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BARBARA WEST

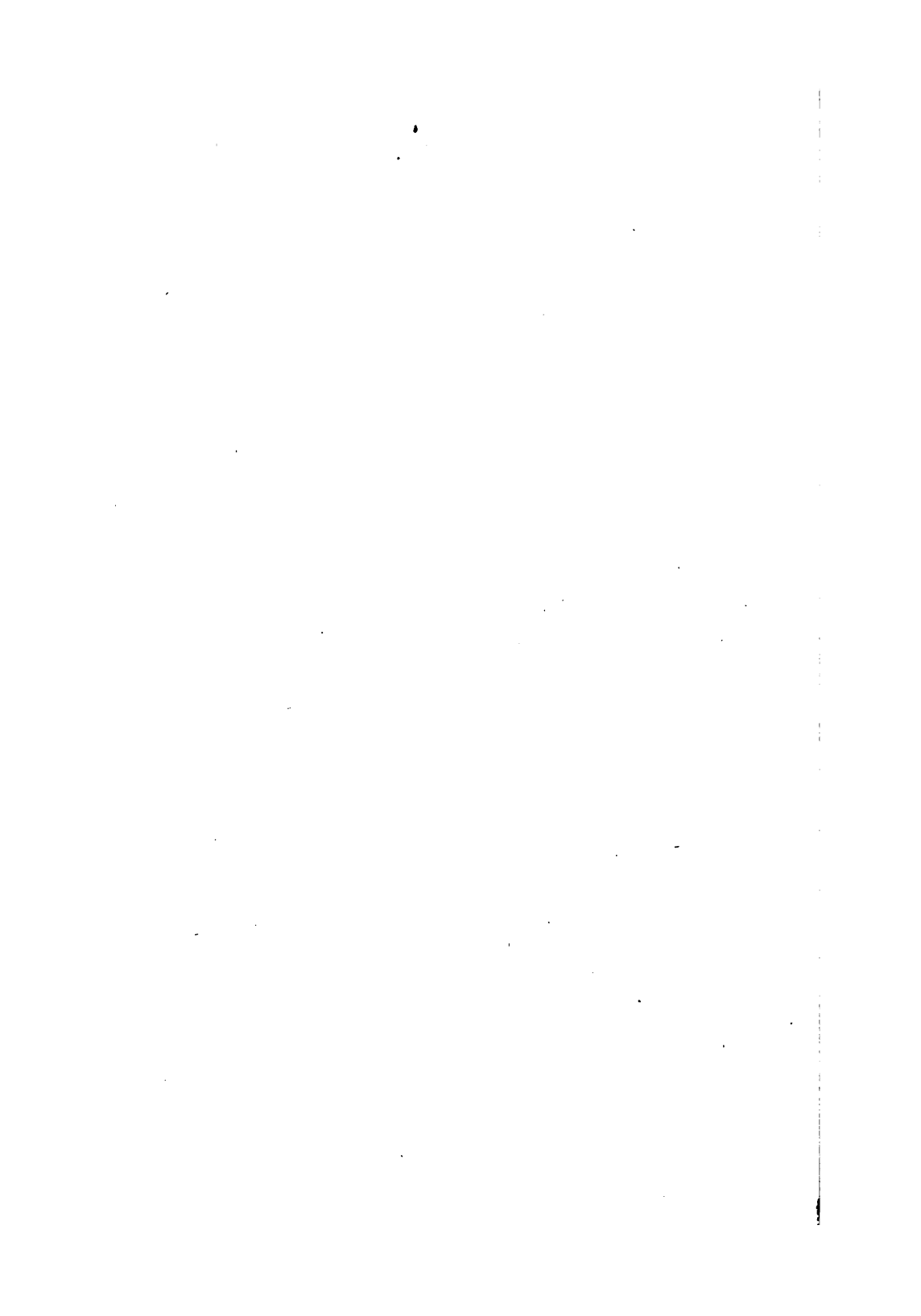
Keighley Snowden





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**Barbara
West**



Barbara West

By
Keighley Snowden

Author of
"The Web of an Old Weaver"



"Nought is there under heav'n's wide hollownesse
That moves more dear compassion of mind
Then beautie brought t'unworthise wretchednesse
Through envies snares or fortunes freakes unkind.
I, whether lately through her brightnesse blind,
Or through alleageance and fast fealtie
Which I do owe unto all woman kind,
Feel my hart perst with so great agonie,
When such I see, that all for pittie I could die."—SPENSER

London
John Long
6 Chandos Street, Strand
1901

TO
MY WIFE

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BARBARA WEST

CHAPTER I

A GREEN YOUTH LEAVES HIS HOME

IN his twenty-first year, Enoch Watson, reporter, donned his country best and went to Merchanton, seeking an engagement on the *Chronicle* for the election of 1880. He had replied to an advertisement, and Mr William Ireton, the managing editor of that influential morning paper in a town of fifty thousand people, had written at once to appoint an hour when he should call at the office.

The editor's note was the first communication of any sort in which Enoch Watson had been addressed as "Sir." It so perceptibly excited him that his mother's heart sank within her, and his father sat up smoking late. They were evidently to lose him. But neither she with her woman's intuitions, nor his father, nor even he himself, knew in what degree it pleased him with the hope of a larger liberty. Enoch was merely aware of a fearful joy; and it brought him to reflect that he was almost a man now, and might accept an added dignity, like new experience, as matter of legitimate ambition.

He was the only son and child of a shopkeeper in a small Yorkshire county town, where nothing happens but on Sundays and market days. Merchanton, though not so big as Leeds or Bradford, was a town with a daily paper, and, what is more, its journalists, by com-

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parison with those of Sheepton, were men having authority. Local officials at the cattle show conciliated them. But as for him, less happy, three years of reporting on the shabby *Sheepton Advertiser*, some normal whips and scorns, and a modern schooling that made him sharply critical of Sheepton notions, had set his young ambition chafing. The reporter is early conscious of importance, however modest Nature may have made him. He is privileged over others of his age to see things, and is required to judge as well as to record. Does he not pronounce, in secret agonies of perplexity and boldness though it may be, upon singers and actors, if not as yet on politicians? and is it not he who puts into good English the ideas of the lesser public men, themselves unapt at doing so? Nobody thanks him for this last-named service, any more than for the others; but the omission attests his independence. In their hearts the flattered pundits know.

Mr Eli Watson sat and smoked and reckoned with misgivings. Pride in a clever son would not content him, though he had spared no pence upon Enoch's education. There, indeed, was one devotion—nowise regretted, however—which had gone to put him out of touch with the lad.

Self-formed, a Yorkshireman in that as in his rugged looks, large-hearted in an immense integrity, zealous, hearty, and as tough to argue as he was quick to help, Eli Watson could do no more for his boy now but continue to love him. In the little Bethel of Sheepton Methodism this man counted for a power. Force of character stout enough for Covenanting times or Lollardry whetted a keen intellect, lifted him high above intolerance and petty cavil, made his rede respected. By all who had come to him in distress he was loved. And he had ruled the one son of his loins

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with a temperate severity, not sparing the rod, but incessant in prayer and a hopeful vigilance. What now, when this one son of his loins, eager and glad to be going, must be neither hindered nor any longer "fended for"?

Eli Watson had perceived that reporting is not an occupation to foster the spiritual life.

His thoughts went back to his own experience of a great town, his rough apprenticeship as an ironmonger. If only he could follow the lad's mind better! Then a later memory, that of his precious Enoch a boy of twelve at "the penitent form," set the long pipe trembling in his fingers. He laid the pipe down upon the oven top beside him, puffed out a labouring breath, frowned, and felt his heart sink low. Perhaps he ought not to have let Enoch practise shorthand in God's house. Notebooks full of sermons, but never a sign again of wishing to stay after service for the prayer-meeting; eloquent and faithful sermons, not unblessed with "great outpourings of the Spirit!"

The meditation deepened. A look of strain appeared upon the tawny and strong face. At length Eli Watson rose, turned out the gas, and betook himself upstairs to wrestle in prayer at his bedside.

When that emotion passed he reflected, with a sigh, that Enoch was a sensible lad, he believed a good lad; and the thought gave assurance to his faith that the prayer must be answered. The gentle south country mother, lying awake, spoke timidly to his affection.

"I'm afraid our boy is glad to leave his home, Eli."

"Nay, my lass," he chided; but she had put his inmost thought in words, and she heard in the rebuke a groan.

Love is happily no appraiser of peril. It measures only the distress that peril brings for itself. The boy

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was keen to be in the lists, and apathetic to his father's creed; but you are to see in Enoch Watson a young idealist, not without a simple creed of his own if he had not formulated it.

He was, however, a boy and no more. The ingenuous and ardent face, younger than his age, showed a nature so impressionable as to be slow in forming; and he was a boy, too, in knowledge of the world—even of the world as it is reflected in books. To know the world, if we are to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world,” was hardly a part of education worth pushing; and therefore novels were not esteemed as useful. Even his ideality had had no fostering but by line and precept. Less narrow than his environment of old ideas, Eli Watson came to regret in after years the defects of his educational method; but it is a fact that, finding his son at fourteen singularly rapt by Lord Macaulay's poems (a school prize), as he had never been by the work of serious minds like Tupper and James Montgomery, Eli Watson took away the book. At a glance he had to condemn in Macaulay the martial spirit. He might have substituted Wordsworth had he known him then; but, being a very forthright thinker, and unæsthetic, he had read little poetry. What, indeed, is a conscientious man so circumstanced to do but expurgate? It was the schooling Enoch had to thank for an early acquaintance even with two plays of Shakespeare.

But for a pleasant evidence of his ideality and ardour—and to admit you a little behind a mask of rustic shyness that he wore—I may here sketch in the manner of his young idolatries.

In the poetic way possible to boyhood he had loved of pretty maids at least a score, each with a quite exclusive devotion. The first was a very small one to

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move him so. But the awful privilege of Christmas parties to bow to the wittiest, kneel to the prettiest, and kiss the one you love the best fell to him unexpectedly at eight years old; it was a privilege never heard of at Sheepton until a circuit minister's wife gave a wonderful party, and upon the shy little country boy it imposed a dazzling embarrassment. He bowed, and knelt, and kissed, all to one small angel in a white frock. I suppose our grown man will face the enemy's guns with no more courage than it cost him to own his admiration; and the romance of unrequited love which then began had a certain pathos. For two years after, it was kept alive by occasional blinding apparitions of his angel, who passed him in the street mild-eyed, rebuking presumption; and he cried about her hopelessly and often upon a child's pillow.

Until, in days beyond the scope of our story, he might love for good, no affair of the heart could equal that in rapture and sweet grief. But time wore out the tragedy, and then he was aware of a smooth-cheeked tomboy, the playmate of half-a-dozen lads whom she outran, outdid in mischief, and fought with gloriously. For her he shed no tears; she was to be his mate and not theirs, and that was the humour of it. Greatly daring, he slyly offered her a brass ring to wear. She laughed him out of countenance and heart; he had not thought that any girl could be so wanton cruel. Others he loved (having seen them only once or fortunately known them) for other graces—for unimagined startling beauty, not approachable; for plain kindness; for bold, bewildering coquetries; for rosy cheeks. Each in her turn was more or less exalted. He grew most happily towards manhood worshipping.

How shall it be told?

In his greenest years there nevertheless befell for

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Enoch Watson some "expense of spirit in a waste of shame"; and as love without poetry is disaster, the disillusionment made womankind seem less delightful. Othello himself was not more wrought upon; almost Othello's act had been done by a boy in his teens, under the rage of an incredible dispossession suddenly found out. So, for awhile, the ideal outlook darkened.

Had this been known, it must have seemed to warrant some forebodings. Diffident shy mother and Ironside father, it was characteristic of both alike to put no faith in breed. They were what they were by the grace of God, and this not at all indirectly, through forelders, but directly to themselves. So with humility they took it, holding the natural man to be shapen only in iniquity.

We look at things more cheerfully than some of the ancients did. The case is that of "A Pair of Spectacles." It is not alone the sins that are visited on the children; the good deeds are thrust upon them also. Out of his puritan home Enoch Watson escaped, an alien from the faith held with a simple grandeur of piety by his sire. "I believe in God" he would have said, as stoutly as "I am"; and in what more he did not know. But he escaped with all the sire's ardour and scrupulous independence, only subdued in show by the mother's close reserve and checked in action by her wistfulness. From both he inherited eager wits, and, creedless, their religious instinct.

Nevertheless ardour, integrity, and the active brain had all to do with his unconfessed apostasy. It is an old story. Methodism at Sheepton was then a trying system. It held that doubt is sin, and preached a verbal inspiration. No need to insist on crudities that now, after twenty years, are marvellously in process of refinement. But years of enforced conformity, and the

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sense of being something of a hypocrite with the old folk, were odious to Enoch Watson ; and now—fine was the thought of freedom !—

No sea
Throbs like the bosom of the man set free.

Of his leave-taking that was, in fact, the tragedy. With little skill to match their love (and none of us for that has skill enough) the old folk had lost knowledge of him in all but daily sight and speech ; and they must now relinquish these. For of course, being clever, he was to have the advertised appointment, and afterwards to seek his fortune where he might.

In that proud expectation the mother, who held her tears back when he kissed good-bye, had furnished him with many useful things in a Gladstone bag. His father marched beside him to the station.

Enoch was not so tall by inches as his father, nor had he Eli Watson's clear brown of health and liberal carriage ; but common accord took them along at the pace of sanguine blood, with little to say between them. He was at this time a lad well-knit but over-pale, with no good looks but clear-eyed honesty ; nothing professional, either, in the cut of his country suit. But he struck one as intelligent, alert, sympathetic, capable ; boy though he was, you might have trusted him at need with much ; and to-day he glowed—with a great pretence of keeping cool upon it.

In vain pretending. At the carriage window the artless father grasped his hand, and with a queer, strained face said loudly, "Good-bye, my lad. God bless you ! Write to your mother, Enoch !" and so stood off to wave a large farewell.

During the forty-five minutes of that eventful journey Enoch never looked fairly in the eyes one other occupant

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of the carriage, so pained he was to think they all must guess his inexperienced homeliness. He put his cap on the rack to seem at ease, and pulled a pair of new kid gloves on, well knowing that in Yorkshire gloves are little worn. Merchanton overawed him, however. The *Chronicle* office looked so large that, upon a first sight of it, he walked past, and went all the length of Remnant Street—looking about with an air of assurance while his courage oozed away.

He entered suddenly at last, saw the words, "Editorial Department" pointing up a dark staircase, and presently stood in a darker passage at the top. There he moved about awhile, feeling like a burglar, and he had just become aware that sundry doors surrounded him when one of them was opened, and in a grimly cheerful voice somebody said, "Hullo!"

"I've called about a situation," he pleaded from the gloom; and as he spoke perceived a very tall man standing in the doorway. This person laughed; there could be no doubt of it, though the laugh was of one syllable only.

"You are the verbatim shorthand writer, I suppose?" he said; and more alarming than the speaker's way of laughing was his full bass voice.

"Yes, sir," said Enoch.

"Well? . . . Come in!" cried the man, and disappeared. And upon venturing into the little room, Enoch saw him seated behind a writing-table, on which there were books and papers littered round a blotting-pad and an ink-stand. He was a black-bearded man, and sat stiffly upright. Moreover, his eyes twinkled with a quite formidable humour. "Shut the door," he said, "and sit down. The chair's safe; we'll have it mended when trade improves."

Enoch blushed, and did as he was bidden, wondering if he ought to say that he had seen nothing wrong with

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the chair. It stood against the wall directly opposite the adversary, who now looked down impassively upon him.

"Got your notebook?" he was asked, and nervously produced it; found at length a pencil too.

"Always keep your pencils in one pocket," said the black-bearded man. "Ready? Now write:" and without delay he began to read rapidly from a newspaper. It was a passage in one of Gladstone's speeches, involved, and full of long words in long sentences. Enoch's knees trembled under his book, so that he had to clip them together, and for the first two lines his pencil staggered, making unintelligible marks. He fell behind, and thought himself beaten—a humiliation he had not known for years, and had begun to think impossible. There was anguish in it. But a habit of intense concentration, which in the practised shorthand-writer shuts up every avenue of sense but the ear and makes his art in the last resort mechanical, came to the youngster's aid, and he held on at a stern chase to the end.

"There!" the big man chuckled. "That's a five minutes turn. Read your notes."

He went back in a fright to that undecipherable first sentence, after a pause remembered what the words were, and found the rest quite plain. The reading finished, he thought he must have passed the examination.

But this examiner was merciless. "Yes, that's all right," he said. "Let me see your notebook."

Page by page the book was scrutinised, with a face in which Enoch Watson sought in vain for any sign of his fate. The truth was, that the managing editor began to think he had found a treasure. His manner at all times belied him to younger men. Kind enough to be humorous, he had no great belief in kindness; and the calmness of the old journalist who is devoted to duty and matter-of-fact had grown upon him like a mask.

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He held with putting young folk effectively "through the mill"; it was a process that had made a man of himself. They found in his pleasantest jest a quality of sarcasm, and upon these terms he ruled the *Chronicle* office with a vigilant patience, pleased with his power, perhaps, yet not abusing it. In this country lad, who sat before him meek and awkward, he liked the ingenuous face because it was eager and docile.

"Well," he said, handing back the book, "we are wanting a man at thirty-five shillings a week, you know. At your age I was getting twenty-five, and had a wife to keep."

"Yes, I'll come at that, if I may," said Enoch.

"At which?"

"Thirty-five," he faltered.

"Or forty-five, eh? Well, can you begin at once?"

"Oh, yes." For the *Criterion's* editor, having a son of his own to train, had provisionally freed Enoch though it was election time, to save a month's wage.

"I—I brought my bag. Are you Mr Ireton?"

"I am he," said the managing editor. "Come along, then;" and he led the way to a large reporters' room, with dingy windows along one side of it, lighted from the counting-house. An alert-looking man of thirty years or so, pale and fat, turned about as they entered, and got up hastily from a long table which had lockers down the middle.

"Here, Paine, here's Mr Watson, a young gentleman who insists on working with us. Show him his locker and trot him round the town, will you? I think he's taken lodgings in advance."

"No, sir, I haven't," said Enoch, with a red face. "I didn't know you would engage me."

The managing editor went away laughing. "All right," he said. "Paine'll put you on to some. I sha'n't want either of you before tea."

CHAPTER II

COLLEAGUES

PAINÉ had responded with alacrity, his large, clean-shaven face most cheerful. As he had not laughed at Ireton's badinage, and undertook so readily to make himself agreeable, the boy was grateful instantly.

Mr Fred Paine had an easy liking for any fellow creature with whom he could get on. In boys especially he took a lively interest, and it is probable that Enoch, in a state of normal self-possession, would have been shy of him. He smelled of soap, and a trim get-up did not wholly redeem the effect of coarse features. His red hair was brushed smooth and crisply turned; he wore a neat blue necktie and a black coat still neater, sitting close about a waistcoat of the same blue. Moreover, these dispositions went very well with his look of potential vivacity, a look so satisfied and bright that one eyebrow rose above the other, as if by way of challenge. But in a man so plump, whose face was rather waxy of hue and unfortunately pimpled, they had suggested to malicious colleagues the dandy butcher attired for a Bank Holiday. Enoch was a little flurried by great events transacted lightly.

What might otherwise have scared his delicate apprehension was not, however, any sense of a comic disparity between the man and his clothes; it was the quality of Paine's alertness. This implied too suddenly that they were on familiar terms, and yet it was keenly observant.

Whatever jokes were made behind his back upon Mr

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Paine's personal appearance, he was not a man to be lightly provoked. He could say very nasty things. A certain hard ability, a swift if limited intelligence, and a disposition to be cynical made him respected. He was a very able journalist within his range. What he lacked, and this deplorably, was sensibility. For that reason, being a frankly immoral person of proselytising habits, he was bound to prove of all sorts of men one of the most astonishing whom Enoch Watson could have met upon his introduction to the life of towns.

His elate manner chimed with Enoch's mood, and the boy replied with candour to a rapid fire of questions, albeit he felt them searching his reserve. The locker having been shown him, he was hurried out and down the stair.

Paine gave him a shock at the bottom. "*What's your name!*" he asked, and, upon being answered, broke out with a high, brief cachinnation. "Enoch! Why, that's the man that used to walk with God!" But seeing the boy colour deeply, he hastened on.

"Never mind, we'll go down to the Blue Boar and see some o' the fellows. What did old Ireton say to you?"

"Oh, nothing much," said Enoch, hiding his confusion. "He tried my shorthand."

"You know," Paine reassured him, "you mustn't be frightened of old Ireton. His bark's worse than his bite;" and in a throaty voice he chatted all along the streets, making a cheerful fuss to encourage the newcomer. It was not Paine's fault, but his misfortune, that he could not put him quite at ease again. Anyone who had seen him walking in advance a little, with mincing steps, must have allowed his way with a country lad to be particularly kind.

In the parlour of the Blue Boar Paine seemed to expand, for he was plainly at home amid a show of

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luxury beyond the dreams of Sheepton. Enoch, if he could, would have shrunk. From sanded floors to carpets, langsettles to a cushioned lounge, taps to silver beer-pumps, tables of wood to elegant tables marble-topped, the change was impressive. He was aware of men who looked him up and down, perhaps wondering where he came from. Paine led him to a cosy corner. Could that marvellous fine creature in black satin, who was laughing with an old gentleman at the window, be a barmaid? Surely the young landlady. Without a trace of hesitation Paine tapped upon the table with a shilling, and then called "Miss!"—whereupon she nodded over her shoulder.

"What's yours?" he asked.

"A lemonade, please," said Enoch, nervously.

"Pooh, nonsense!" cried Paine.

"I—I'm a teetotaller," the lad confessed; and imagining that all eyes were upon him, he made haste to set himself right with the company, saying that he was "in training." The barmaid coming forward, Paine took him at his word.

"A beer and a lemonade, miss. What do you mean by training?" he asked. "Lemonade's no good."

"Football—and swimming," said Enoch, desperate (the football season was over), and Paine forbore to question further. He took no interest in athletics. His interest in "the new junior" dropped accordingly, and they sat without speaking until the drinks were served, when Enoch saw him wink at the barmaid. It was a discreet allusion to the old buck at the window, but the boy suspected some reference to himself, and his ears began to tingle. This barmaid sat on a stool and talked with them across the table, giving him an artless glance now and then, and laughing freely at the expense of some "johnny" whom Paine had tried to chaff her about.

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"Oh, yes," she tossed. "Thought I'd go off for the day with him because I wore his silly roses. What do *you* think?"

What Enoch thought presently, seeing her bold with everybody, hearing Paine called "Fred" by her, and astounded that one gallant youth who put his arm about her waist was not rebuffed or noticed much—what Enoch thought would have surprised her greatly. When they got up to go, after what seemed shameless dalliance on Paine's part, he was hot from head to foot, and breathed the fresher air of the street with pleasure. All the same he plumed himself as rather more of a townsman for that experience.

"Well?" questioned Paine, a little eagerly. "How d'you like Harriet?"

"She seems good-natured," he hazarded.

Paine said she was the finest woman in Merchanton. "Let's go to Hawkesforth's," he cried in the same breath; "we shall find some o' the fellows there, anyway."

Hawkesforth's was a billiard-saloon with half-a-dozen seedy tables on a top floor, and here Enoch found two of his colleagues, agreeable rogues of his own age or thereabouts, one of whom, Jack Darbyshire, with a brilliant show of clean linen and a sporting necktie, shook hands very cordially and said he was "First class, thank you," and his mother's pride and joy. To this refreshing young exquisite the newcomer took a fancy. Darbyshire was tall, fair, and good-looking, with perfectly frank bearing and lively eyes; moved about with extraordinary energy; and made merry with himself and everyone indifferently.

"My shot," he said. "Wait one moment, sir, and you shall see the Artful put a forty break on." He strode round the table announcing "John Roberts on the

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warpath!" and snatched at the chalk-boxes while he shook his cue. "Marker, a policeman! George has all the chalk in his pockets." He advanced upon the thief with a truculent swagger and whistled shrilly, burlesquing now the officer of law. "Help!" he called, prancing. "Hold him while I break his head." And when, after using the chalk, he had carefully miscued, Darbyshire came back to the lounge punching his own head. "Kick me, somebody," he pleaded. "Young Watson, kick me, will you? You look strong and fit."

Enoch thought him the funniest dog in the world. Darbyshire, on his part, was doubtless pleased with a new admirer who laughed until the tears came; the more so that Paine repaid his simple drolleries with mordant comments on the game, while George, a hobbledohoy in spectacles, could only grin, and calmly "potted the white" when chance availed him.

A couple of men came in who were on the staffs of an opposition paper, and Enoch saw with surprise and pleasure that they did not keep a distance and whisper together, as opposition men did at Sheepton, but behaved in all points like colleagues. One of them told Darbyshire what was on at the police-court, which, it appeared, that careless wag was "doing."

Fine fellows they seemed to be, these Merchanton reporters! Even Paine was presumably a good sort; such older men as Enoch had known were either shabby and obsequious, or shabby and standoffish. For country papers were a last refuge of the failures. He remembered one man in particular with shame, a poor devil with a greasy and frayed coat who starved himself all day to save his pocket (subsisting, it would seem, on beer) whenever he had a public dinner for night engagement. On one terrible occasion this broken outcast sank forward on the table during speeches and loudly snored,

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while Enoch sat with flaming cheeks and dared not lift an eye from his notebook.

The game of billiards ended, Paine and he went out with Darbyshire. "Ta-ta, young Watson," Darbyshire said. "Must turn the honest penny, y'know."

"Oh, I'll come with you," cried Enoch; and then he looked at Paine.

Paine said "No!" reproachfully. "Not to a beastly police-court! Besides, you'll want some dinner. I'll introduce him to Petersen's, Jack; you come to us." And he carried him off, pointing out well-known men in the streets—with most of whom he was on nodding terms—and talking scandal about them with a mild exhilaration. At Petersen's they waited in vain for Darbyshire (Paine surmised that Ireton had "bagged him" for another engagement), and the afternoon was passed idly over coffee and cigarettes.

When Paine talked journalism he was interesting. He had a store of racy reminiscence and anecdote, *le dessous des cartes* of public life, very surprising to novices; and he did not dispense his tales with an air, but entered quite gleefully into Enoch's view of things. If it were not that character is important in such a person, Paine might have made a delightful private tutor. Enoch forgave him faults of taste with the half-formed notion that a man of the world cannot be nice, and admired as modesty his light treatment of big things like railway smashes and colliery explosions, or the reporting of Gladstone, Disraeli and Bright. In the society of this real journalist he felt his foot on the ladder. His admiration appeared very artlessly, and Paine took a liking to him.

"You'll get on all right," he said. "Come and lodge at my place, if you like, and that'll save trouble. We can't bother now to go about hunting; besides, you

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ought to have advertised. It's a cheap place. You can share my sitting-room, as it happens ; a fellow that lodged with me went off in a huff only last week."

Enoch closed with the offer. But Paine put him out a little in the course of hedging it with a view to smooth partnership.

"Of course," he said, "any time either of us wants the room"—and his eyebrow lifted to a smile—"the other can clear out, you know. What do you do on Sundays?"

"I—I expect I shall go home," said Enoch. "Would you prefer to—"

"I mean you ain't pious, are you?"

"Oh, no!"

"I'm a Freethinker, you know," said Paine.

Which rather scared him, as being a profession of some odium. What was worse, Mr Paine failed to see that it did so, and went on to give his reasons at considerable length. He rode a hobby. The new listener grew hot and uncomfortable, made desperate efforts now and then to change the subject, and was bored to distraction.

He felt that he would rather not lodge with a man of such peculiar scholarship and zeal, but now there was no drawing out of it. Paine did not refer again to their bargain. And as they rose to go to the office, he put an end to hero worship very effectually by a touch of patronising humour.

"Of course," he said, condoning the pooriness of response to much wit and eloquence, "you haven't begun to think for yourself yet. You'll get on all right. But some people daren't say 'Boh' to a parson."

CHAPTER III

MORE COLLEAGUES AND OFFICE TEA

THE MERCHANTON CHRONICLE was run by an ex-clergyman, now a leader of local government aspiring to be mayor some day.

Its literary staff, from the managing editor down to the youngest reporter, took tea together daily, after a fashion common then to many larger offices; and, what was not so common, the proprietor, doing a full share of work himself, dropped in sometimes to drink a hasty cup and eat a slice of bread and butter, standing by the table. This office tea was a fine fraternal institution. Except in his presence, when the younger men were conscious of their small importance, it went merrily. The proprietor, for his part, was vaguely aware of being a wet blanket; hence the fugitive manner of his visits. He had less the air of owning a paper which he had but lately bought than of not belonging to the party. There were, it is true, occasions when he would look about for a chair, and accept one from somebody while that retainer hunted up another. But he lacked the Bohemian spirit. Few men have it who are owners of papers and pay the wages of your rank-and-file Bohemian.

Mr Alderman Smith may be supposed, moreover, to have felt some natural anxiety of a host as to the style in which the meal was served.

For Enoch it had a charming air of informality, like a picnic. There was no table cloth, and every man cut and buttered for himself, and used a piece of copy paper

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for a plate. Bohemian this, at all events. I suppose that, now the *Chronicle* is dead, there is no newspaper office in the land where you can enjoy the same simplicity, the Spartan satisfaction, the certainty of sitting down, if you would, to plain fare every day, including Christmas Day and high days of all sorts. It may be thought that the host at such a table had satisfied his sense of fitness; that, putting all anxiety behind him, he might have joined with a good grace pleasantly in all the table-talk, keeping it going. Mr Smith had not the happy turn of mind to dismiss the cares of his position. Also, he must have remarked the appearance on the table of occasional pots of jam and other needless foods which he had not provided. He had, indeed, sometimes been asked to partake of them. Of course, he declined. His own tastes—not only in office hours, in the midst of serious business, but at all times whatsoever—were simple. To do Mr Smith justice, he would rather the offer had not been made. It obliged him to put a difference between himself and the company, whereas he liked to feel, at least, that his show of a personal hospitality left him on an equal footing with them. True, he had a special spoon reserved for his use—a silver one. It was kept in the pantry by the woman who spread the board and washed up afterwards; and she brought it in with a cup and saucer when he came to table. A man might indulge a small caprice of that kind. He disliked metal spoons extremely.

Now, the Bohemians did not allow that they were ill-content with plain fare. They affected as a rule to despise the jam, which was brought to the board by juniors only, boys with a sweet tooth. Nor would they own a jealousy of Mr Smith, the alderman. It was understood that the special spoon had been relinquished

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voluntarily from a common use. The seniors held it desirable — without acting upon this view, which would have meant formality—that all should rise when the woman brought the spoon in, and make a slight obeisance. The reporting staff scorned to jest about it, pretending not to see the spoon. But there was unanimous agreement as to the insufficiency of the other spoon for eight persons ; and there were certain standing jokes on the scheme of entertainment.

Some of these, with a few spontaneous ones, were trotted out for the encouragement of the new hand. Darbyshire began the pleasantries. He sat by Enoch's side and poured his tea. Might he offer him the spoon—the spoon, the *common* or office spoon—the sacred symbol? Order, please, gentlemen ; Mr Watson would now swear loyalty to the companionship and stir his tea. Mr Watson blushed! Dear, dear ; perhaps he ought to explain. This munificent repast was provided daily, free of charge, any man who chose being at liberty to introduce shrimps. Mr Watson was too deeply moved to say anything. They would understand his feelings. No ceremony, pray. The main thing was to keep your eye on the loaf, and grab it—modestly but firmly — whenever it was disengaged. You were requested by the managing editor not to dig a hole in the centre.

"You will do very well," said Ireton, bearing in upon the merriment with his bass voice, "to watch Mr Macdonald carefully, and not to cut it as he does. This is Mr Macdonald, the gentleman whose hair, you see, stands upright. Mr Macdonald—Mr Watson, our shorthand prodigy."

Macdonald, with a grim smile, cleared his throat and nodded. "Mr Ireton," he said, speaking with trenchant deliberation and a Scottish accent, "will at

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any teime instruct you very exactly in the art of eating an egg."

He was the palest man in the room, this little Scotchman; but he had the toughest and most ardent look of any. His eyes, which kindled with a hardy humour, rested steadily on Enoch's face while he spoke; and then he cleared his throat once more, rubbed his hands vigorously together, and smiled a little with enjoyment of his own sarcasm. The hands and wrists looked as strong as a workman's. This kind of repartee, the relish of it, and the surprising volume of hard voice that emphasised it, confessed pugnacity; and Enoch glowed under the look with a certainty of its honest kindness.

Ireton laughed good-humouredly. "I believe," he said, "Macdonald chews the shells, just to have a way of his own;" and the rejoinder seemed to be thought very effective.

Paine in particular haw-hawed at it. Perhaps the managing editor's wit had more success than Darbyshire's.

"Does he? Now we know," cried the latter, "what's gone with the spoons!" And it struck the sober country lad as very droll to hear this wild impeachment placidly admitted.

"Change of diet," Macdonald said. "Necessary change of diet. Mr Watson should know that it is by no means usual at this table to introduce any such staggering luxury as shrimps."

"Well, potted meat, then," said Darbyshire. "Anyone vote for potted meat? Or bloater paste? Or wateroress?" At each of these there was a cry of simulated joy. "The shrimps have it," said Darbyshire. "Mr Watson, the company gratefully accepts your offer of a pot of shrimps, and looks towards you."

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"Don't do anything of the kind, Mr Watson," advised Macdonald through his teeth.

Darbyshire protested. "Mr Watson feels it a privilege. We can't all masticate spoons."

"Certainly," said Enoch. "It is a privilege—if you will accept—"

They hammered on the table, making the cups dance, and he heard Darbyshire's voice on the stairs shouting "Boy!" In this commotion Ireton leaned over to the Scotsman to quote severely, "Don't nail his ears to the pump," and when the shrimps were fetched neither of them took any.

There is virtue nevertheless in the old custom of footings. It broke the ice for Enoch, and put him on good terms with his new colleagues of the reporters' room. Besides Paine and Darbyshire there were two of these. The elder, a silent man verging on middle age, had appeared crestfallen; the shrimps cheered him up a little. His name was Sowerbutts; but he answered readily to "Wistful," a pet name that Darbyshire had found for him. Enoch, himself very prone to be afraid of ridicule, studied him without seeming to do so, and saw with pleasure that Macdonald paid him some attention. The other was a boy, who filled his mouth and drank tea until he grew red in the face.

It was not easy to see how they would eat potted shrimps without forks. But each man got out his pocket-knife, polished a blade with some small scrap of paper (the boy would have used his coat sleeve, but, being taken in the act, was frightened into nicer manners), and made up a squabby sandwich. It was as good as Robinson Crusoe.

"After me, please," said Darbyshire to Paine; "that's your tobacco blade."

"No, it isn't," Paine protested, and was not believed.

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The seniors were talking politics. Enoch heard Ireton say of the election, "It will be over in three weeks," and was dashed at remembering the terms of his engagement; the advertisement had read, "Wanted for the general election," simply. The chatter buzzed in his ears meaningless while he went back upon the interview in Ireton's room, and tried to put a value upon the scant oracular praise he had earned. Why did the managing editor make fun of his shorthand writing, calling him a prodigy? He had read fast enough; but people never knew how fast they did read. It was the bringing a bag, as if he were sure of being engaged! He had said at home that it would look cheeky, and it had spoiled his chance, he supposed. His cheeks burned. But then, Ireton poked fun at Macdonald too—one of the staff. He would ask Macdonald if he thought—

"These artful mere politicians," Macdonald was saying savagely, "are so darned cocksure. Southwark isn't Yorkshire and the Land o' Cakes anyway. . . . It's precisely Dizzy his vanity. Nobody else in the ordinary senses God gave him would have done such a thing. Here's this ridiculous majority at a bye-election, that no sane man can account for, and Dizzy concludes quite naturally it's his magic popularity. Result, letter to 'My dear Marlborough'; which is likewise part of the magic."

As Enoch listened Macdonald appeared a terrible fellow, to be approached very cautiously. Ireton, unmoved, had the air of quietly enjoying his asperity. "You will observe," he said agreeably, "that Macdonald evades the point."

The little man sat rather more upright, with a side-glance of veiled defiance.

"Which is," pursued Ireton, "that this kind of thing brings grist to the mill."

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Macdonald threw back his head and broke out with the heartiest kind of rapid and noisy laugh that Enoch had heard. "Well!" he cried. "Of all the cold-blooded money-grabbers!" And then desisting with a chuckle, he rubbed his eyes. "High Jingo!" he sighed, and came suddenly to attention again, blinking cheerfully. The laugh seemed to have done him good, for he had the look of being under-slept and newly out of bed—which was, in fact, his case.

A frowsy and florid man in spectacles, who sat on his right hand—afterwards identified as Heap, the second sub-editor—now said sulkily that he supposed there would be an increase of "screws" all round; and Paine backed him up with a furtive "Hear, hear." This aimed at the managing editor, whose duty it was held to be to keep Mr Alderman Smith informed of his indebtedness. Darbyshire, more bold than Paine, said "Laughter"; and laughter there was accordingly. But, as they were accustomed frequently to write, the subject dropped. It would not bear much handling.

Then Paine began to talk of a Press Club that he said should be started—if there was any pluck in Merchanton pressmen. It appeared that he had seen one in Brummagem, when Bright spoke; all the fellows sat up until three o'clock at a social, and had all the good old songs, "The Old Rogerúm," "Jack Hall," "The Fine Old English Gentleman," "The Darby Ram," "Three Jews went to Jerusalem," and "Down in Alabama." Fred Maccabe was a member, Maccabe the ventriloquist, and gave them a show; he was a wonderful chap; and then there were two or three music-hall artists—and Johnny Oxford, of the *Birmingham News*, he did some card tricks, good enough for a platform any day—a first-class affair, and it went like a clock from start to finish. "Those Brums are heroes,"

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Paine said. "One of 'em climbed a lamp-post, young monkey, and sang 'The Old Rogerum' from the top of it. He said he was going to bed there, and took his boots off and put them in the lantern. They had to throw things at him."

"At the hero," said Ireton, who seemed to be checking off particulars.

"Yes, the beggar wouldn't come down!" cried Paine. "I should think he stuck there a quarter of an hour."

"Very quaint. Still, he came down, I suppose?"

Paine burst out, "Oh, you haven't any sense of humour;" and Macdonald laughed so joyously that Paine saw how the land lay, and pushed his cup away annoyed.

Thereupon the conversation flagged. This topic was not without interest; but Ireton asked Enoch if he had found lodgings, treating it as negligible.

"I think so," he answered; and Paine said quickly, "Yes, it's all right. He's coming to mine."

There was silence, and Enoch caught an inscrutable momentary flash of Macdonald's eye.

"Well," said Ireton to Paine, "don't disaffect him."

Tea was about over. The propriator appeared, nodding briskly to Ireton and Macdonald, and casting upon the rest a glance of incidental affability. Enoch was not quite sure that he himself did not escape unnoticed: most of them quitted the table, and he got away to his writing-place at all events unchallenged.

This was at the other end of the room, back to the wall, under one of the dirty windows. Newcomers were put in the two window-seats because they were draughty. The room had a great stretch of desolate floor space uncarpeted; the walls were bare, except that in one corner there stood a stack of bound files; and sitting silent with the rest, all busy, or pretending

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to be so, while the man who was to pay his wages talked with Macdonald in an undertone, Enoch felt a chill touch him. It was another atmosphere than that of home, and somewhat colder than he had imagined it. This willowy, tall and furtive gentleman, who spoke with a southern accent glibly, repelled him like a foreigner.

Presently they were left to themselves, and Darbyshire over the lockers gave him a friendly wink. "That's the great boss," he said; "Mr Alderman Reginald Smith, J.P. He can put you in quad for six months, my boy."

"Workhouse, more like," mumbled Sowerbutts.

"Does he write the leaders, or Mr Ireton?" Enoch asked.

"Not they!" said Paine; and Darbyshire explained that Macdonald was "really the editor. Ireton," he said, "is the general nigger-driver; and Reggy sits downstairs in his little room and sees the merry ads. come in."

The truth about Ireton's function was, that in this unconventional small office he joined to managing editorship all the responsible duties of chief reporter, allotting the work, directing the quest for local news, and sometimes even turning out to take a hand. Enoch saw him go out that night with Paine and Sowerbutts to an election meeting at the Town Hall.

He himself was told off "to make the calls" with Darbyshire; and finding that he had a couple of hours to spare before this duty claimed him, he carried his bag to the lodgings, made terms with Paine's landlady, and got his first latchkey. He was to pay twelve shillings a week for a small bedroom, his share of the sitting-room, breakfasts, cold suppers and attendance: washing, and any other Sunday meals, would count as

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extras. The woman explained that this was what Paine gave her, and Enoch said "All right." Afterwards he speculated vaguely on what he might be able to save; vaguely as much because, when at home, he had never had money to spend, as in ignorance of the occasions made by comradeship for spending. He saw himself passing rich on a margin of quite ten shillings a week.

At last he was out in the world!—a man, with no one to say what he should or should not do.

CHAPTER IV

MAKING THE CALLS

RELIEVED now of the small anxieties connected with a change of place, Enoch Watson made his way to the office again. A fine exhilaration filled his breathing out; he felt his feet, he had his wish, he would show what a power of work he owned, and at once the town took hold upon his fancy. The mingled flare and gloom of the larger streets, the business quarter almost quiet now, appealed to his mood. He thought it mysterious, imposing. Now that no roar of traffic stunned him he was aware of lofty and sombre buildings, of the great width of carriage-way between them, and of a sibilation of loitering feet and chatter. He slackened pace unconsciously, listening and watching. Now and again his ear caught a note of laughter.

Darbyshire stood beneath the office lamp, leaning on a cane and twirling his moustache; and upon seeing Enoch he waved the cane aloft and came towards him briskly. "Right O!" he said. "Now we'll give the girls a treat;" and he linked arms.

Enoch accepted the escort with a fearful joy. Jack Darbyshire was dressed as he had only seen men dress in tailors' fashion-plates, and this, with the lively manner, promised big adventures. His Sheepton clothes, he felt, were quite unsuitable for anything of the kind; but how should a lad of spirit falter? Besides, one might be frank with so merry a fellow; at a pinch he could always draw back.

The truth was that he walked in safe company. Jack

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Darbyshire's phrase of "giving the girls a treat" was whimsical, a mere synonym for taking a stroll. It evinced the cheerful spirit in which he set out upon the nightly round of routine, in search of small news. He and Enoch were scarce out of Remnant Street when there was proof of this in an incident oddly painful. A girl swerved across their path, looked him swiftly up and down with admiration, and dipped a curtsy. "Oh, you pretty boy!" she cried. "They'll eat you." Enoch caught his breath. But Darbyshire took the compliment with an airy "Ah, Bessie!" and a lifted hat; they did not pause.

"Do you know her?" asked Enoch.

"Bessie? Oh, everybody knows Bessie. Worse luck, poor girl! . . . Say, if old Paine worries you any time, look me up; my place is next street above, seventh on the left—7, the mystic number. Your back door is right opposite."

Enoch thanked him gratefully; he would not forget, he said.

If Darbyshire had not seemed indifferent he must have plied him with questions. He understood to what outcast, shameful class the girl belonged; but to say "Worse luck!" and put her out of mind was far from the disposition of his innocent pity. He despised himself for the instinct which had taken alarm at her. She was pretty; an astonishing charm had flashed from her eyes and smile; it was not possible, he thought, that she could be very wicked. How did she come to such a pass? Did the man who despoiled her know of it? He would not be that man for a kingdom, thought Enoch.

This was in the under-current of his thoughts while Darbyshire asked him how long he had been reporting, where he was last, how he liked the fellows. "I

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wonder," he began at length, suddenly, "what she was before she—before—"

"Bessie? Before she came on the streets? Ah, you never know, my boy," said Darbyshire lightly. "They've all got a fairy-tale of some sort. I believe she's a decent little woman, though; says she was one of Hans Flora's people, lost her voice; not a principal, of course. But I don't know much about her, young Watson. Off! Not my line, dear boy. Jack Darbyshire's his mother's pride and joy."

Nine o'clock boomed from the Town Hall bell, and Darbyshire said, "Come along. Now we'll do the General Hospital."

In the surgery there a young medico, with a nurse at his elbow, was putting stitches in the eyebrow of a dirty fellow who sat under the light, stolid, with his head back. The air had a lingering smell of anæsthetics. "Keep still, you fool!" cried the student; and Enoch looked no more. A row of doleful out-patients, most of them miserably clad, sat on a form by the wall, waiting. He turned from these to a zinc-topped table in the midst of the room, littered with surgeon's tackle—lint, bandages and splints, queer bright instruments, sundry bottles and basins, a stray cast of some deformity. Darbyshire consulted the admission book at a little desk by the door, unnoticed and heedless. Enoch went out into the corridor.

Then came a call at the central police-office. They passed the Town Hall, a great lighted building that stood on one side of a square, and a roaring hum of laughter and cheers resounded from within. "Hear that?" said Darbyshire. "There are those poor devils shorthand-writing. Columns of it."

If the calls had not been very interesting Enoch would have liked to be with them. Columns of it!

A little crowd was clustered about the lock-up door,

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shut against curiosity; but the constable who kept it let in the two reporters with a nod. They had to pass to the charge-office through an open space of basement, pillared and dimly lit, echoing to their feet; and Enoch heard a woman's voice protesting passionately. "I can speak to my friends, I hope," she cried; and, "Yes, he is! Keep your hands off me!"

"It's Bessie," Darbyshire whispered, and they looked in. She stood with her back towards them, between two big plain-clothes men, both very young; a long high desk in front of them, and behind it a bald, benevolent sergeant, calmly writing; within, a glistening trophy of cutlasses over the fireplace.

"Mr Sergeant, is it allowed to pull women about and tear their arms off? See, my wrist's bleeding. He's cut it with the bangle—that man! He's a coward—a coward!"

"Gently, my girl," the sergeant said. "You should behave more quietly."

"But what have I done? I've done nothing. If a pal owes me anything I should think I may ask him for it!" She had begun to cry, and she took out of her pocket a puff-ball with her handkerchief.

"We've watched you long enough, Bessie," said one of the men.

"Yes, you have!" she retorted through her tears. "I should think you like the look of me."

"Take her to the searcher," the sergeant said quietly; and the girl, filling the place with supplicatory clamour, was pushed out and hurried through the open space into a corridor. Enoch strained his ears for the last of her cries.

"Good evening, sergeant! Anything on to-night?" Darbyshire meanwhile asked.

"No, sir; all very quiet."

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"This is our new recruit—Mr Watson. You'll know him again."

"Oh, yes." There was quite a kind look in the sergeant's eyes; and he might have said something pleasant, but Darbyshire did not wait. He bade good-night, and they were immediately in the street again, seeing the door thrown open to the disappointed crowd. The amazing thing for Enoch was, that except by the crowd this queer distressing scene was taken as matter of course. Him it oppressed with unavailing pity for the girl; "the hand of little employment hath ever the daintier sense."

Darbyshire was on good terms with his luck, inasmuch as he had only one paragraph to write; and he proposed to go and write it now. "Never keep the comps. waiting," he said.

It did not occur to the raw novice that there was policy in this, although a wink accompanied the maxim. There was, in fact, the whole art and strategy of judicious reporting in it, which is, or in those days was—for now professional pride has changed all that in Merchanton—to guard against overwork, like the simple bricklayer with his so many bricks to the hour.

It will seem to the reader of sprightly wit that "the calls" meant much or little work as chance determined. But does he quite appreciate their importance?

He lacks, of course, experience. The importance of the calls, let me say, was to be measured by their maximum yield, and this is a murder or a big fire. Darbyshire held that view. It would have been inconsistent with it to call at the fire-station forthwith. There might not be a big fire, and that call was the last.

As broad as long, you suppose. And it is to be observed that Darbyshire lost no time in writing out his paragraph. Enoch admired the extreme rapidity

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of his composition. It could not be that he was hurried; they had gone about the quest for news at leisure, except indeed in the actual making of inquiries. Darbyshire was believed to be scribbling fast from force of habit. There did appear, however, to be a show of haste in his friendly word to the printers' overseer when handing in the copy; he mentioned with some *empressement* the fact that he had "run in with this before doing the fire-call." Also he ran down the stairs and started out briskly, in a way to make one think the fire-call critical.

When, being clear of the office, he fell into the former strolling pace, and said the calls were a most responsible engagement bound to take up time to-night, Enoch smiled. He understood rather less than nothing of the strategy. He smiled at the alternation from dawdling to haste, and the lapse from haste to dawdling. "Have you," he slyly asked, "anywhere to go besides the fire-station?"

Darbyshire took a side glance at him, with raised eyebrows, and then linked arms again. His march was military. "My dear boy," said he, "the chief duty of his mother's pride and joy is to introduce you all round. It takes up time. Also, do not despise the fire-station."

Enoch's face of perplexity moved him to explain.

"Put your trust in Dollinger. In about five minutes those lazy beggars will be in from the Town Hall, howling for you and me to take dictation. Always look after No. 1, dear boy. *Chacun pour soi. Sauve qui peut.* See?"

Enoch perceived that daily and weekly journalism are differently conditioned.

CHAPTER V

BARBARA

It was due to this management that Enoch, on the first of his days in Merchanton, met Barbara West. The meeting, however, was accidental; and it was otherwise such as to make a sharp impression on his mind, for Barbara, who had been playing at a concert successfully, appeared to him in the most vivacious of happy moods. As the new friends walked arm-in-arm a little girl in an opera-cloak hurried by them; and Darbyshire, uttering her name, darted forward. She turned her head rather timidly, not sure of the voice; then in a reaction of cordiality she greeted him with great friendliness.

"Oh, Mr Darbyshire, how you startled me!" Enoch heard her say. "I can't shake hands; I have both music and violin."

Enoch in his turn was almost startled by the unusual beauty and sweetness of her looks. Darbyshire, relieving her of the cases, introduced him merrily; and the ready smile and bow she gave while beginning to talk about her pleasant evening did not lessen his confusion.

"You'll see me home?" she said to Jack. "That's a good boy. . . . Oh, I've had such a nice concert; encored twice, and all *kinds* of compliments."

"So glad," said Darbyshire.

Coquettishly Barbara described her success. Her candour of satisfaction in it, and in Jack's evident pleasure, gave to the sprightly voice and manner a

Barbara

certain quality of cosiness ; and the country listener found her very ladylike. He was delighted especially by a trick she had of imitating child's talk, prettily done. "Ees, Barb'a West's gett'n' on," she minced. "Got to play again to-morrow, and next week *free times*."

"Good !" commented Darbyshire. "So you ought. What a jolly cloak, though !"

"Do you like it ? Yes, I think it's nice. Oh, but you should see my new frock !"

This she said with such engaging impressiveness that Enoch, to whom any innocent and gay friendship between the sexes was wonderful, walked beside her charmed. She nodded in response to Darbyshire's look of exaggerated interest, and promised him, "I'll let oo *peep*, when nobody's not lookin'."

"Will you ?" cried he. "I shall never sleep after it, dead sure. Better tell me what it's like first and shock me gently."

"'Tisn't shocking," she pouted. "It's a velly *pretty* frock ;" and she made believe to change the subject. "Where were you going if I hadn't met you ?—Oh, and Mr Harmer's given me a bangle. '*M—m*.'"

Mr Harmer was the conductor, a grey-haired amateur of generous susceptibilities.

They slackened pace while she pushed an arm out from beneath the cloak.

"By Jove !" Darbyshire pronounced, "it is a nice one, Barbara. Oh, I've seen some frock !"

She clipped the cloak about her and stood pouting again. "Not fair," she said.

"Where's my bit of smoked glass ?" he cried. "Where is it ? Young Watson, how dare you look with the naked eye ?"

"I didn't," said Enoch, mournfully.

They stood under a lamp, and Barbara prepared to

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dazzle them. "You'll make fun of it," she said. "You don't deserve to see it, then."

"'Pon honour!" Darbyshire assured her.

"Well, there, then!"

For the first time Enoch Watson admired a young lady in evening dress. The pretty frock was pale green, with a spray of moss-roses at the breast. Barbara walked on, smiling and nestling in the cloak, delighted by Darbyshire's cry of "Oh!"

"Nice?" she asked, first of him and then of Enoch. "Nice? *P'n't* it?"

"Scrumptious," Darbyshire said. But Enoch's praise she had to read in his face, and perhaps it was not very legible.

"Made it all by myself, out of my own head! But you mustn't tell anybody. . . . Mother said it was too plain. Do you think so?"

"Nonsense! It's just perfect. Thing of beauty, joy for ever. Now, why didn't they make me a musical critic? Our man doesn't know a frock from an old sack; no eyes; blind as an owl."

It was diverting to see her take this literally. She was thinking of the frock too hard. "Is he? Poor man," she said. "But how does he write?"

"Oh, don't you know? Trained the little dog to do it. Has a little dog to lead him about and carry the programme. Most touching."

"Now, I know *that's* not true," she cried, stopping. "It's silly. That's the way he always talks to me, and I think it's too bad, Mr Watson. I don't believe the man is blind, now!"

"Then he ought to be," said Darbyshire.

As they chatted on, Enoch gained courage to look her in the face; and while it was in profile his eyes never left studying it. He supposed her age to be about

Barbara

eighteen, and he was at least two years below the mark; but she was little, and had still the school-girl's chubbiness, with dainty lips like a doll's, and small, merry eyes. On the cheek nearest him there was a tiny brown mole. The only firm lines of the face were the lines of the nose and forehead, but they helped the sweetness of it in repose to give her an air of pleasant self-possession. With the opera cloak she wore a blue velvet cap, and there was a rumple of brown hair all about this. The white brow and neck and the little pink ear showed in vivid relief. But Enoch would have been quite unable afterwards to give any such account of her; she made him too happy to see clearly.

He envied Darbyshire that extraordinary flow of small talk. His very best effort was to ask, "What did you play to-night, Miss West?" and he was forestalled half-a-dozen times in trying to put that question.

"I played Alard's Fantasia on *Faust*, and De Beriot's *Scène de Ballet*—do you know it?—and then I had to play Wieniawski's Mazurka for an encore. So stupid of me, I had nothing to give them for the second encore. Mr Harmer was quite excited about it. Do you play at all?"

"The piano, a little," he answered timidly.

"Oh, I wish you'd come and play for me sometimes. I have nobody."

Of course he took her seriously. Talking for talk's sake is not Yorkshire manners.

"Oh, I don't play so well as that," he made haste to explain. He could play hymns, and the recitatives in *The Messiah*, but nothing else with confidence. "I should put you out, I blunder so."

"Not if you practised, would you?"

"I haven't a piano here. My piano is at home, in Shepton."

. Barbara West

"What a pity! It's awfully dull practising by oneself. Yesterday I practised five hours all alone."

"Jewillikins!" cried Darbyshire. "Shall I come to turn over for you?"

"No, you sha'n't," she puckered. "You're not a good boy. You may come to the Art Gallery tomorrow, to hear me play—if you'll talk to me nicely and bring Mr Watson."

Darbyshire felt at his nose. "Out of joint," he said laconically. "Young Watson, give the lady your arm. I'll fall behind with the luggage."

It was very absurd. He did fall behind, and turned his coat collar up, trailing his feet and pulling a wistful face. "'He stoops to Conquer,' or 'The Gay Lothario Snubbed,'" he said. Whereupon Barbara stopped and gave him two little slaps on the hand. "There!" she scolded. "Now walk properly."

So they came merrily to her gate, in the same suburb where he and Enoch lodged, and in a street with little gardens and pretty window-blinds. "Won't you come in?" she said; but Darbyshire answered, "Can't to-night, my dear." My dear! How Enoch envied him. Then, as lightly as if it all meant nothing, they said good-bye.

But on the way back to the office Darbyshire was almost serious. "Oh, young Watson," he lamented, "why am I a twopenny mean reporter? Why aint I a millionaire, or a family grocer? Error; must see to it. . . . Mother-in-law not nice, either, *entre nous*. Mean and proud, and looks like a publican's wife. . . . Heigho! Good little girl, isn't she? Sweet little woman!"

Enoch, for his part, was full of heaviness. He said, with a burst of heroic emotion, that he could give his life for a girl like that.

Barbara

"Couldn't you!" cried Jack, delighted. "That's just it; a *dear* girl. Beastly shame to let her walk home alone after dark."

Darbyshire had to make a second round of calls at midnight, but Enoch sat in the office to wait for Paine, who had proofs to read, and seemed to claim his company. In the proof-reading he gave a hand very readily, and yet found time to write two letters, to his father and his late editor.

But of the adventures with Darbyshire Paine heard nothing. Enoch would as soon have told them to a turbaned Turk as to this derider.

CHAPTER VI

ENOCH GETS TO WORK, AND FALLS IN LOVE

THERE is a strong fascination in out-of-door journalism for all ardent natures. It satisfies these with variety of scene and occupation, it forbids them to pry very far below the face of things, and, above all, it is eager. Chivalrous natures are quickly fired by it with that pride of fellowship which the French have named *l'esprit du corps*. In the busy days that followed, Enoch Watson was eaten up of zeal.

Zeal awoke in him that first morning when he opened the *Chronicle* before breakfast. He found Darbyshire's paragraph, brief, exact, well-turned; he admired the handsome show of type in a three-column report of the Town Hall meeting; while in Macdonald's leader, which surprised him by its polish and a placid irony, he found, with a new kind of pleasure in being behind the scenes, some traces of the table-talk. He was pleased with the clean look of the sheet, the precision and fine orderliness of all that type, the *Chronicle's* goodly size. It had an effect of importance and nicety. He burned to be at the police-court where his work would begin, to have a hand in producing this effect, and to share the credit. So proud of his office was he, that the constable who barred his way into the court a moment, mistaking him for an ordinary person, had one of Enoch's stoniest looks of indignation.

Enoch's business was to make, after the fashion of those days, an exact, impersonal record of all cases in which the facts were more than commonplace. He must

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comment upon nothing, describe nothing, leave the facts to tell their own tale. His headings, above all, must demonstrate a strict impartiality. Within these lines, you will see, it was easier to sin by omission than by commission; but what should a young reporter do if not police reports? Enoch's were just as well done of their kind as he could do them; and he was sure they would interest all the friends of people he had to name, if the general reader found them flat and unprofitable. But what his young ambition would have thought it a fine thing to do was to show one half the world how the other half lived.

Ireton seemed to have shrewdly warned him against that very enterprise. "No picture-squee and frivolous writing," he had said—but that was only a way of putting it—"and no tears. What we want is bone fact."

It was as if the magistrates were calm spectators of some mean, disordered drama, with leave to question the actors because these hardly knew their parts. Some stood out distinctly enough, frank embodiments of evil, or feeble suffering, or heroism; but all, at least, were unaware of the effect they made. Prisoners or witnesses, Enoch reported what they said, or what was said of them, for upon this the magistrates pronounced their opinions; but his study was their faces. When he could look into any of these with a touch of fellow-feeling—when its expression was not altogether amorphous or sinister—the interest of the drama quickened; it appeared to him that they were hurried off the stage half-questioned, misunderstood, condemned unjustly or slightly heard.

He continually, by an effort of will, broke the spell of a close attention, not to fall behind with his report, which ought to be finished when the court rose. Looking up once, he was startled to see the woman Bessie in

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the dock. He had forgotten her. She said nothing to the magistrates; he saw that she wished to seem lady-like at any cost; and she went below to her month's imprisonment with a little toss of the head.

He got away from the court rather gladly, having satisfied his zeal for the time; and, remembering on a sudden the Art Gallery, went in quest of Darbyshire.

He had not once recalled the scenes of overnight since his eyes fell upon the morning's paper, and the prospect of again meeting Barbara West excited him. The thought of her friendliness recurred like a memory of good fortune, and he had a clear picture of her pretty face. Lucky Jack Darbyshire! But any girl might fall in love with Darbyshire. He was one of the jolliest and best fellows in the world.

At the office Enoch found a laconic note left for him:—

“DEAR E.—Off to football final. Give my love to Barbara.—J.D.”

He could not have given a true account to himself of the start this caused him. But he looked at the diary to be sure that he was free, and then at the day's advertisements to see when the music began, with a flutter of extraordinary eagerness; and as soon as he knew his way clear, courage to go alone forsook him.

What had he to say to her? He could not even imagine himself giving her Darbyshire's message, “love to Barbara;” just that, and nothing to go with it, would sound so naked. Besides, he would have to praise her playing; he could never do that to her face. Even if it were a case in which he had to write what he thought, to find the proper words would take him hours. And the publicity of her company! It was as much as he could do to walk up to a reporters' table, knowing that the audience would think it natural and not presumptuous;

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but to step forward and, as it were, make himself familiar with someone on the platform — that passed the bounds of his audacity.

He went out for dinner, keeping his heart against the knowledge of this, and even chose a cheap eating-house to avoid Paine, who might detain him ; but it was after the hour for the recital when he made a bold push and marched up the street where the Art Gallery is. The secret of this hardihood may have been that he thought Miss West would be now within.

People were passing into the building in an unconcerned way ; he heard now and then a burst of pianoforte music when some inner door opened ; and, not to be seen hanging about too much, he drifted into the entrance hall and found some statuary there to be looked at. Presently he saw that there were pictures, too, on the staircase. He could make his way in under shelter of these and spy out the land.

He turned about towards the foot of the stair, and in that instant was aware of a young lady coming quickly past it as if she knew him. Supposing Barbara to be within, he did not recognise her against the light. With instinctive politeness he affected not to have seen this lady, and fixed his eyes on the stream of traffic in the bright street beyond ; but she put herself before him, holding out a tiny gloved hand, and her voice electrified him.

"Good afternoon, Mr Watson. How good of you ! Did you think I wasn't coming ? Have you been upstairs ?"

His shyness was forgotten, though he felt himself blushing terribly. "No," he answered, "I've been looking at the statuary. You're not playing !"

"My violin ? I got it carried down for me. Oh, yes, I'm playing," she smiled. "Shall we go up ? Where is that naughty Mr Darbyshire ?"

Barbara West

She was looking pleasantly about at other newcomers.

"He has an engagement. Did you want to see him?" he said. "He sent his love."

"That was very nice of him;" and Enoch thought he saw a glow of pleasure, though she spoke the reply like a commonplace.

"Well," said he, loyally, "he meant it, I know."

"Oh, do look at that funny old creature's bonnet!" she whispered. "Near the big picture. Pea-green and puce." So he had to abandon Darbyshire. "Isn't it dreadful—like playing down from G sharp to A or something? But puce is a discord by itself. . . . I hope she doesn't plant herself where I shall see her: I *know* I should play out of tune. Let me look at a pretty picture."

They were on the landing. She moved about quickly from one picture to another, finding none to please her. Enoch laughed at the third or fourth impatience, and then Barbara turned about and resolutely toddled away to the music-saloon, where she stood aside to let him open the door for her, pretending to pout. Thus she came to a sweet composure proper to the moment of entering.

Nobody noticed them. It was a long, large room lighted from above, with a narrow gallery round it. Under this gallery the exhibits—statues, curios in glass cases, bas-reliefs and pictures—surrounded an open space full of chairs. They entered on one side, among the cases, and kept along by the wall to a dais at the end, where the pianist was finishing with a flourish. At an open door by the side of this dais Barbara stopped, and spoke to him through the patter of applause.

"Where will you sit? I must go in and take my hat off."

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"At this corner?" he proposed; and she nodded, smiling so brightly that he was overwhelmed.

You will not misjudge Miss Barbara West. That smile of hers, which the happy simpleton took all for himself, was brightened, of course, by her self-possession in face of an audience, and by the pleasure to come of playing for them in another pretty frock. These are little triumphs not to be reasonably grudged her. They were part of her reward for ten years of preparation, first a drudgery and then a very sober purpose. And as for the other smiles, and the pretty ways, and the inclusion of Enoch Watson among her many admirers, all this belonged to the pleasure of living. You are to see, as occasion offers, that Barbara had a serious, practical and quite determined nature, kept out of sight for the most part not so much by her affectations, which were playful, as by a too solicitous disposition to please. She was paying some court to Enoch, not at all aware of flirting with him; but so she did, poor boy, to everybody.

A buzz of chatter in the anteroom began presently to discompose him. He looked round upon the scanty audience to recover his calm, meeting the eyes. They were plain people, and as little at ease in the place as he was.

A singer came upon the platform, the accompanist shambling behind her, and he settled himself to hear the music, seized by the first notes of a piercing and graceful symphony. The song was "The Better Land," then by comparison new, yet old enough as songs go, and he was fond of it. Listening, he forgot Barbara West, and himself, and the place where he was; for the twentieth time, at least, it ravished his ear and stirred some tumult in his breast, so that he watched the parted lips of the singer with a kind of holy passion. She was a slender girl, fair, with homely eyes; she sang very sweetly.

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Then came a bass with "Nancy Lee." He gave out that popular song with a face more gloomy than his voice, and a slow, unvaried emphasis. When he was done—Barbara!

As she stepped upon the platform, looking, with her chubby face, demurely pleased like a child in a new pinafore, a whispering went among the people. He felt a little shiver of anxiety, her self-possession so delighted him, her beauty was so sincere. She wore a plain short gown of purple velvet, with sleeves that ended just below the elbows, and broad white lace about her shapely neck and arms. It showed a supple and easy poise of body when she raised her violin; the rich colour gave an effect of softness to her vivid skin; and her dark, glossy hair was in plain keeping with it, carried wavily back from the forehead. She stole a glance in lifting her bow, and it pierced him. Then with the first deep notes her pretty eyelids fell, she flushed slightly, and the smile was gone from sleepy lips.

She played from memory, and to Enoch it was as if she made the searching music. The rapture of the composer, the rich response of a fine instrument, he did not distinguish in it: he was a creature of one sense, and knew that with her fluent arm she wrought him to a sudden rare delight. It caught his breath and giddily surged over him. This passed; he was pleasantly borne upon a stream of melody into quiet waters, and so at length awoke. Barbara was bowing with her pretty simper before a gust of acclamation; and Enoch was deep in love.

For a listener so sensitive to music he had little pleasure from the next hour of it. His diligent eyes returned to the anteroom from every idle quest. One or two young men entered it, and of these he was

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jealous, they had so much the well-groomed look of town-bred youth, with their curious spats, of which he did not even know the name, and faultless clothes and showy stand-up collars. He was sure they were not musicians; what did they want there? The talk in the anteroom began to be audible, even during songs; a laugh jarred upon the most touching part of "The Skipper and his Boy," which the girl who had sung before was finishing, and Enoch sat in misery with a burning face. Somebody within whispered "Sh!" and after this there was only now and then a snug auricular murmuring. But he looked in vain for Barbara to reappear; he lacked a programme, and in the second part of the recital a boy 'cello-player seemed to have supplanted her.

When the audience began to get in motion, dispersing, he steeled himself to approach the door, and presently looked in with the eye of indifference. Barbara was chatting with a tall fellow (one of the fine intruders), who held his hands behind him and looked down upon her solemnly. At the sight of her pleasant face upturned, Enoch shrank away with a chill at his heart.

Had she expected him to wait? Perhaps not; but he lingered, and saw her at last come out. She advanced upon him with quick steps, and frankly desiring praise began to sound him, smiling. "Are you pleased?—did you enjoy it? It was awfully good of you to come."

"I came because of you," said Enoch (she dropped her eyes an instant), "and oh!—well, you played divinely!"

Her face lit up. "Do you think I did? They say I ought to have taken the encore. You think the *audience* was pleased: it was an encore, don't you think? If I had gone off after bowing once—?"

Barbara West

"I'm sure they'd have liked to hear you again," he blushed.

"We're not supposed to take encores, you know, at the Art Gallery."

They were moving toward the stairs. "I'm sorry Mr Darbyshire wasn't here," she added. . . . "Don't you think he's very funny?"

But she was "talking for talk's sake"; at the door he saw her look back inattentive to his answer. She seemed to be bowing to somebody, but he did not turn his head to see.

"Yes," he said, a little uneasy. "I wish he'd been here. . . . May I have your fiddle-case?"

"Oh, I like to carry it," she answered.

Something in her bright look put him out, for Darbyshire had carried it; and they went down the stairs with nothing to say. Descending slowly, in the crowd, they were overtaken at the foot by the solemn admirer, who raised his hat, but hesitated as he did so. Barbara was visibly flurried. "Oh, Mr ——" (Enoch did not catch the name) "let me — may I introduce Mr Watson?" she said. "Mr Watson is a very kind friend of mine; he's on the *Chronicle*, you know; not the musical critic, of course, but—"

"Ah!" said the fop, after looking him up and down. It was all he got out; but she had to seem content, and she rattled on about something else. For a moment Enoch's eyes had an eager sparkle. His outraged notion of properly repaying that lack of courtesy was a blow; and this being impossible he did nothing—very confusedly. They were some way down the street, one cavalier each side of her, when he discovered that Barbara was speaking to him.

"I refused Mr Watson. Didn't I? You asked me first for it—serious boy."

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He understood that she was talking of the violin-case. "You might give it me now," he hazarded, turning fiery red.

Barbara laughed, which somehow consoled him. "Oh, that wouldn't be fair," she said; and then in turn she found a word for the interloper. Why didn't she shake him off? His voice and his laugh were insufferable.

They had, it is true, a heavy affectation now becoming obsolete. "Haw, haw! Deuced good!" he cried, and stopped at that moment by a confectioner's window. "I say, may I offer you some refreshment, Miss West? A glass of wine?"

Unfortunately, Enoch was himself the interloper as it chanced. Barbara looked at him quickly, and answered "Thank you" as she did so. "You don't mind, Mr Watson?"

But seeing him bewildered, with a white face, she came suddenly quite close, and spoke in a murmur. "Did you mean to see me home? Oh, you silly boy, what a pity! I promised Mr Armitage. You shall see me home *next* week—if you will." She gave his hand a quick little squeeze, looking him clear in the eyes for one delirious moment, and then spoke aloud some meaningless words for the other's hearing: "But you were quite right about it. Bye-bye, then! So good of you!"

He was left almost in tears, a whirl of happiness about him, and scarce the presence of mind to raise his cap. People jostled him off the causeway.

CHAPTER VII

A HERO, AN ATHEIST AND A MUCH-PERPLEXED PHILOSOPHER

I HAVE to crave indulgence and sympathy for a highly inflammable youth. Barbara was not only that most encouraging of playmates, an innocently vain girl of generous impulses, but the first girl he had seen in his life with town manners, ladylike, employing a ready natural tact, and so in a small way far more alert and clever than he was. She dazzled as much as kindled him ; there had been others, but such a sweet fine creature as Barbara had never been among them, or been imagined in his day-dreams. The sweetness he carried in a tremulous bosom ; the incredible fortune that her kindness seemed to promise kept him doubting.

When, after parting from her in the street, he found himself presently at the office door, and so remembered Darbyshire, Enoch bounded up the stairs, eager to see him and tell how finely he had fared. He checked at the thought that Darbyshire might not be wholly pleased to hear of it. It is true that this did not trouble him much ; but he was relieved to find the reporters' room empty. He sat down, over a rumble of machinery that sounded from the jobbing-room below, and tried to collect himself. What had she meant, showing him such delightful friendliness ? He dared not think she meant too much ; it was her way, no doubt—her way with others, too, and that was mortifying ! He was jealous for her. He was sure that town fops were not to be trusted, and burned with a magnificent contempt of them. Their conceit ! With half a grain of sense they

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would have understood that her beauty and innocence were not to be approached with stand-up collars and sounds like "Haw, haw! Deuced good!" She required the posture and dear reverence of poetry; he put her beside Juliet, and Rosalind, and Miranda; he, and he only, was to kneel to her, crying, "O you wonder!" and suffering sweet sorrow; nor would he dare to ask for any favour of love. True, she was to grant him the rapture of such favours all unasked. They would come like the intimate tender speech with which she had soothed him, startled him, made him deliriously happy with the promise of he knew not what.

He sat until tea-time with his ecstasy—sometimes writing her name, in a reverie; moved now and again to finer transports by a phrase of poetry recalled, which set his mood to music; or falling back into bleak anxieties. He paid to the table-talk at tea no closer attention than one gives to the traffic of streets. The newspaper press of the provinces might, as alleged, be half inspired just now, the press of London blind: it was equally to him a little matter. Paine watched him.

Even as he made the round of late calls that night—alone—a pleasant hurry of the spirits went on within him, not quite unlike serenity. It was overborne at last, however, in one moment.

He stood and turned about at a clamour of shrill whistling, new to his ear, and on came the fire-horses at a break-neck gallop. While he held his breath they were past and away; he saw the swaying load of helmeted men, but not their faces, and without any thought about it he was instantly flying along in pursuit, like one of the straws or bits of paper in the wake of a through train.

The fire being near, he came upon the scene of it in

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time to hear the clank-clank of an old-fashioned hand-engine begin to sound like a wild beating of the heart. It was in a narrow *cul-de-sac* of poor houses, dark but where some tongues of flame from an upper window lit the smoky depth of it, showing a crowd there. He, with a few others, ran down the street and saw the water rise in spirts and drench the flame; whereupon heavier smoke poured out, seen in a dull glow.

The police, who kept a ring, let him stand within it; in times of excitement the reporter, like everyone else with business in hand, is easily known from the mere gazer. Enoch was lucky in the moment of his arrival. Being almost thrown down by a fireman who darted in from behind him to the engine, he saw this man drag out a horse-cloth from the locker and go straight into the burning house. Two others made to follow him, but a sharp command of "Keep back, Smith!" held one of them. The third man went instead of him, dragging a hose.

In the hurry and din all about him Enoch stood with a sense of suspended activity and will, such as comes in a dream sometimes. That a deed of heroism was then and there transacting he did not understand. They were less like men than dream figures that he saw in motion; and the crowd of lookers-on was vaguely imagined, a still background of the scene, filling it out. A fireman staggered into the foreground, stooping, with a reel held between his knees and the flat hose lying in a line behind him. He seemed clumsy and slow. There was a policeman quietly wiping his forehead with a handkerchief taken from his helmet. The two rows of men at the clanking engine, facing each other, racking at the alternate pumping-bars, were indeed a picture of human lustihood at a desperate pinch; but the rhythmical movement fascinated him. The engine

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shifted while they worked. He saw a ladder being reared against the window, and men filling it.

But he was presently aware of some woman in distress whimpering close behind him. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she was saying; and when he looked about, there she stood in a nightgown among policemen and moved her clasped hands up and down. That sight quickened his wits.

There was a shout from the crowd, and, turning, he saw a group of firemen by the door. One with his helmet off and a hand against the wall was retching and coughing, and he went upon his knees when they clapped him on the back. Instantly the white figure of the mother was among them, snatching a little bundle in the horse-cloth; she pressed it against her bosom, looked in among the folds, and began to cry out bitterly with long, shuddering wails.

The child was dead, then. Harrowed by her cries, he watched some neighbour woman get her away to an opposite house. The door was presently closed against a mass of people who thronged about it.

Enoch eyed the rescuer, who had got upon his feet again, but was evidently spent. His mate kept asking, "Art 'a *burned*?" and at length he shook his head between gasping and clearing his lungs. He got out a word of explanation—"Rik!"—which is Yorkshire for smoke. He was black with rik. But he donned his helmet and walked unsteadily towards the engine, saying he would pump some air into him. Then he found burns on his hands. The captain looked at them in the light of a police lantern and cried, "Away wi' tha! . . . Cab for this man!" Whereupon Enoch awoke to the claims of his own business and approached him to get the story.

Upon taking him by the sleeve he found it still

Barbara West

warm ; and, had there been time, he would have put his questions to this man with extraordinary deference. There was, however, neither time nor otherwise a fair opportunity. The crowd roughly jostled them, with hearty cries of "Goo' lad thee !" and "Gie him a cheer, chaps !" The cheer went up, and in the unlighted street they were always more or less separated. Thus all he got was the hero's name, and the fact that the stairs had been ablaze ; the man, indeed, tried with a kind of sulkiness to put him off. "Nay, it're nowght," he said. A cab met them as Enoch was asking for the third or fourth time how he found the child ; and if the other fireman with him in the house told what he could when questioned later, something was left to the imagination. But among tearful women in the house of asylum Enoch found one washing a noisy baby, which proved to be the rescued child, very much alive and none the worse. He got away to the office with a light heart.

Barbara West was not in his thoughts until he reached his lodgings, and then the afternoon seemed yesterday's. He was glad to find Paine sitting up. In some anxiety to win that colleague's great approval, he began to tell him all about the fire ; for he had written an account of it which could not be described as bony with the facts. But Paine, in slippered ease, looked far from serious, and after a couple of sentences there seemed no more to say.

"How much have you done ?" the senior asked.

"Half a column, about," answered Enoch, dubious of so much. "Mr Ireton told me to write what it was worth. Do you think I've overdone it ?"

Paine sipped his whisky-and-water daintily. "Ah," he said. "Enthusiasm ! Youth ! You'll get over it."

Enoch might have been discouraged, but he suspected

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Paine of being not quite sober. Paine's face was pink. Therefore he made no reply, but sat down hungry to a supper of bread and cheese.

Paine watched him over his shoulder. His humour in the hour before bed-time was complaisant, and he found the boy amusing.

"How old *are* you, Watson?" he presently inquired.

"Nearly twenty-one," said Enoch.

One is legally a man at twenty-one, be it remembered; and Paine made light of the fact. "Important age, aint it?" said he. "Don't you feel important when you think about it?"

Paine was tipsy, decidedly; and he had a most unpleasant smile. "I never do think about it," Enoch answered, colouring.

"Oh, but you should," cried the humorist. "You aint a lily of the field, y'know. I was a father at your age."

Thereupon Enoch conceived with mortification that, drunk or sober, Paine mocked him; and, this being the second time, he cast about in embarrassment for a way to endure it.

"What you lookin' so sour for?" said Paine, agreeably. "Let's be social. Because I'm interested in your soul's welfare!"

"I don't see why you should care about my soul," blurted Enoch.

"Now, that's unkind, young Watson," he was admonished. "You're only a boy, y'know, after all; an' the world aint what you think it is. Let's be philosophers. Let's plan a little world of our own, now. I want to see what your ideas are. You've got ideas, haven't you?"

Against this harping on a disagreeable topic Enoch made a stand, prepared, if need were, to be rude. "No," he said, "I haven't."

Barbara West

"Oh, yes, you have. 'The righteous shall inherit the earth'; that's in the Bible, aint it? Very well. That's a good thing. Let's start with that." And Paine took another sip and tilted back his chair, purposing to ride his hobby amiably. "Well, it aint so, is it? We'll make it so. What's the good of being righteous if you get nothing for it?"

"Do you mean," flashed Enoch, "that *I* pretend to be righteous?"

Paine's chair came down again, and he faced about. "No, no," he drawled, waving his glass to and fro with a gentle deprecation. "You aint in this. It's a hypothesis. Don't you see, we're God the Father and God the Holy Ghost *now*. We're going to start a new world. All the good men in it well off, as they ought to be. Very well, then."

Had Enoch been ever so keen to argue, such airy blasphemy must have put him out. He pushed his plate away. "You're drunk, Mr Paine," said he. "I'm going to bed."

"What's the matter?" cried Paine, starting up, and speaking rapidly. "Stop a minute. No, don't be a fool. What's the matter?"

"I don't like your talk," he replied. "I'm not obliged to listen to it!"

"Oh, but you can't run away like that," Paine protested. "That's no way. Sit down. I've something to talk t'you about; not that, something else. What a fluster! Here, sit by the fire."

It might have been wiser to go. But he was ashamed of being supposed to beat a retreat; Paine, too, appeared genuinely surprised, and perhaps a little upset. Besides, if he would change the subject—

"What is it?" said Enoch.

"Sit down," pleaded Paine. "Let's be social, any

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way." He would have written "sociable"; Paine's conversation did not do him justice. "Oh, it's nothing much. . . . How d'you like Merchanton?"

"I—I think it's a fine town, if that's what you mean."

"Seen any pretty girls?"

"I saw a woman called Bessie. She was sent to prison for a month to-day at the police-court. I daresay you know her."

This was a thrust, but it glanced off the other's armour unnoticed. "Oh, but something choice, y'know," said Paine, insinuatingly. "Not that sort."

"Big barmaids." Surely a home-thrust!

Paine raised his fore-finger with an absurd suggestion of playfulness. "No, little Barbaras!" he said. "He, he! I saw you, young Watson."

In after years Enoch oftenest thought of him as he appeared at that moment, and the memory fostered a loathing. The truth is that he was frightened as well as indignant. In Paine's mouth the familiar use of Barbara's name was horrid and almost unnatural; and yet his strongest impulse kept him from resenting it—lest Paine should find in her, of all forbidden topics, one in which they had a common interest.

"You mean Miss West?" he said indifferently. "Oh, yes, she's a friend of Darbyshire's."

"Ah, you're blushing!" said Paine. "Come, y'know, you can't deceive an old hand like me. Think I didn't see? Why, *of course*. Now, don't lose your temper, cos I'm not jealous."

"That's funny," said Enoch, enraged beyond bearing.

"No, it isn't funny," Paine disputed; "I can take her out any day, and she'll make a fuss of me if I let her. Oh, she's a little warm un, is Barbara."

Barbara West

An instant later the tortured lad was instinctively avenged. He had struck Paine upon the mouth.

Paine scrambled up from the hearth-rug with a white face, and a dark trickle of blood on the chin. "What you doing?—what you doing?" he stammered. "What you striking me for? Don't you get trying on those games, my lad. You'll find yourself worse off, I can tell you. Young milksop! In training, aren't you? Mamma's boy!"

Enoch pushed him away and went upstairs, trying not to feel excited. He shut the room door as he went, and would have locked it had there been a key. As it was, Paine opened it to shout after him, in a mincing tone—

"Don't forget to say your little prayer!—'Fegive us our trespasses'—*Enoch!*" Which somehow made him laugh. Paine appeared in every way so like a vulgar boy of the streets.

In the bedroom he laughed again, a little hysterical from exultation. Paine's fat, white face, and the manner in which he had got up in a serious hurry to talk, struck him as comical; and he laughed until he was exhausted, from stifling any sound of triumph. But, the fit over, he was unstrung and conscious of a misgiving which did not shape itself. Instead of undressing he sat on the bed and strove to recover peace of mind.

This he considered was not the end of hostility, but the beginning. What would Paine do? He seemed such an incarnation of evil that Enoch supposed he would stick at nothing. What *could* he do? . . . With Barbara! The lad's flesh crept, and he heard his heart thumping, felt the strength drain out miserably from his limbs.

He would have to get new lodgings. The notion of meeting Paine in the house from day to day was odious and frightful. He could not be always fighting, for

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that was what it would mean. At the office, perhaps, Paine might not talk. What a horrible quarrel! If only he had not struck the beast nothing need have come of it; and he could still have found new quarters.

It flashed upon him that if Barbara knew how Paine had boasted he would make poor headway with her. But how tell her! Being too proud so to demean himself, he found no comfort from the thought. He fell to despising Paine as a rival. Aghast at Paine's enormous wickedness, he reflected that Barbara, too, must have seen it; it was coarse and in the grain; why, he seemed a sort of Caliban—a monster! What was it that he had said . . . as if he would set down God?

Something—Enoch tried fearfully to think of it, because he had had no answer for it—something odious, at any rate, like putting his tongue out. And it had miserably seemed to be true.

That a creature like Paine should thrust in upon his secret thoughts with a chuckle was unendurable. Besides, his heart was hot with shame for the argument declined. There came a singing in his ears when he thought of it, trying to disentangle the one idea which had startled him. . . . If he could be sure of Barbara! While Barbara's peril troubled him it was impossible to think.

Paine's idea! He must see to that, in order to get his mind clear. "Why shouldn't the righteous inherit the earth?" He began to puzzle out the absurd hypothesis. If people knew for certain that by doing good they would "get on," wouldn't everybody *be* good? He was almost frightened of thinking so, it seemed so impious to criticise. The reflection came to him with the force of a very pleasant discovery that the wicked don't of necessity inherit the earth more than the righteous. If they did, he laughed, Paine would be an emperor, with a harem, and a fiddle, and several breweries.

Barbara West

If only Barbara were not so easily pleased—so kind-hearted really! He would fear Paine less. That snob she went to have a glass of wine with. . . . She ought not to take wine. He would tell her so. When he imagined Paine plying her with it, a possibility terribly suggested to him by band of hope literature, he began to walk about with clenched hands and sweated with extreme distress. He had to consider the end and know if he would dare the gallows for her. It seemed to his heroic mood no great matter compared with her undoing; he conceived that he could die very cheerfully; and having reached this noble pitch he was almost calm, with something of the peace of martyrdom.

When good sense hinted that all this was extravagance, he turned about and asked why. The real extravagance, he was afraid, appeared to him to be that God allowed such evil men as Paine to live. With that the philosopher began to undress, and stood for a while in the dark with his coat in one hand, pondering.

A cloud came over his mind at last, fatigue of excitement and the day's work. He went to the window and pushed the lower sash up high. Merchanton lay wide before him, sunk in a gloomy couch of the hills, silent, with many lamps burning. He thought it a strange fine sight—until he had looked awhile at the stars, devotionally, and then it somehow stirred his pity. He was glad he had seen that hero fireman, heartily glad; the fine deed had been done so much as a matter of course.

About two o'clock he heard Paine come up to bed. He remembered that he had been vain of lodging in the same house with him; but it was stranger to have quarrelled with a man so suddenly. Listening to the creak of Paine's unsteady tread in the next room, he felt a little mean, for he had struck

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a drunken man. Again he got to wondering what Paine would do.

In the act of drawing down the sash some way he saw a lighted window of the ground floor opposite. Darbyshire, surely—not in bed yet!

CHAPTER VIII

A SHORT CONFABULATION IN THE SMALL HOURS

FEELING for his latch-key to be sure that he had it, Enoch took his coat and hurried downstairs and out. The light was at No. 7, as he had supposed, and Darbyshire came to the door after a second tap on the window.

"Hullo!" said he. "Nothing wrong with the bed, I hope?"

But when Enoch, in an oddly serious tone, asked if he might come in for a minute, "Certainly, my boy!" he cried, and clapped him on the back in manifest concern. "Not ill, are you, old chap? . . . Works all right?"

"I've had a row with Paine," said Enoch, going before him into the room—"about Miss West;" and he showed a very disturbed countenance.

Darbyshire looked as serious as Darbyshire could. That is to say, he stood suddenly still, gazed at Enoch in some wonderment, shut the door, and told him to make himself comfortable.

"Had any supper? Have some rhubarb pie!" he suggested.

"I had supper with Paine," said Enoch, "thank you. I saw you were sitting up, or I wouldn't have—"

"No 'pologies, young Watson," interrupted his friend. "Always at home to a pal, dear boy. What's the gentle Paine been saying?"

"I don't know what he said exactly," faltered Enoch, whom Darbyshire's cheery manner disconcerted; "something about Miss West being—being fond of him. He said he could—he seemed to say—I thought I would

A Confabulation in the Small Hours

tell you because he might—because I didn't know what sort of man he is. I struck him, you know."

"The deuce you did!" cried Darbyshire, opening his eyes. "Fight?"

"No; he didn't fight."

"Damaged him?"

"His lip was cut, I think."

Darbyshire continued to gaze a moment, and then, like a squib going off, laughter took him. Nobody laughed like Darbyshire. It was not a convulsion, but a cruciation, a rigour, that sharply doubled him up; he looked you hard in the face meanwhile and screamed; finally, as a rule, he got out his handkerchief and stamped on the floor.

Enoch smiled ruefully.

"You look so sorry!" cried Jack, beginning again instantly; "as if it had hurt his feelings—don't see? . . . Still, poor old Paine! . . . It was a surprise!" And he nodded, and had a little laugh with his back turned to finish with. "I say, young Watson," he added, "you'll distinguish yourself. You don't let the grass grow. . . . What d'he do?"

"That's why I came to you," said Enoch, intent on his fears. "He did nothing but get up again, and—"

"Knocked him *down*? Oh, crikey! Oh, this is idyllic! Why didn't you give me the tip, my boy? This is an event. The Leary 'Un and the Sheepton Slogger—with the 'rawr 'uns,' one round. Brilliant knock out by the Slogger!"

"Oh, but he was drunk," Enoch explained. "Don't tell the others, will you? Of course I shouldn't have spoken of it, but he seemed to—I didn't know what he might do. . . . Isn't he a bad sort; rather a—a beast, I mean?"

"Why, what can he do? Can't blight you".

Barbara West

"No, but with Miss West," said Enoch, timidly.

Darbyshire's blue eyes, fixed upon him steadily again, betrayed no more than a passing thoughtfulness. "You mean because you hit him?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Oh, no. Oh, shouldn't think that! No, Paine's only a talker; did he threaten that sort of thing?"

"Well, not exactly, but still I thought I ought to tell you." Enoch reddened.

"She's not my girl, you know," said Darbyshire, quickly.

He was not aware of being glad to hear this, but only of a shock as in finding himself at a wrong door. He replied in some confusion that perhaps he was mistaken; Paine had only said that she always made a fuss of him, and he had thought that Darbyshire might—tell her not to do that. Somehow, with this avowal, there came a lump in his throat.

"Oh, I shouldn't worry like that, old chap," Darbyshire said kindly. "Barbara's all right. She makes a fuss of everybody, bless her!"

As a matter of fact Paine, not without credit, had gone to bed merry. Young Watson was a silly prig; most amusing; couldn't stand chaff a little bit. Moral in this case was, turn your cheek to the smiter. In the cold light of morning Paine might, indeed, be less disposed for toleration; "no breakfast, no man," it is said; but he could owe a grudge and not expressly plan revenge. Amiable dissipations had softened his edge, if you will; he was content with what he called "the intellectual campaign of playful banter." Intellect, that was the force to rule the world. Let us be humorous and then we should be happy.

Enoch was not convinced, but apparently Darbyshire thought him rather foolish. The consultation suddenly drew to a close.

A Confabulation in the Small Hours

"You think Paine was only joking?"

"Always talks a bit rank when he's screwed."

"But he's naturally 'rank,' don't you think?" said Enoch, half laughing.

"Can't stand him myself," Darbyshire owned; "but I say, that wasn't all you punished him for, was it?"

No doubt it appeared an absurd affair. "He shouldn't be so insulting," Enoch answered angrily. "I'm not a baby, and he's a bully. He should have let me go to bed when I wanted to."

"Oh, of course, if he teased you," Darbyshire admitted.

"He's a low cad!" said Enoch.

A good epithet is heartsome. He stood up to go, and Darbyshire, feeling that he had not had his laugh out, made only a half attempt to keep him longer.

"I wish," said Enoch, hesitatingly, "you'd let me have my breakfast here."

"Why, certainly, old chap! Come at ten thirty sharp."

And upon that our hero went off cheerfully to bed. We are kindly made, even the most excitable of us. With minds that may be set illimitably to work, we can always sleep in time of health and strength upon a makeshift.

CHAPTER IX

MACDONALD ON FALLING IN LOVE

IN the afternoon of the next day (normal reckoning) Macdonald came down early, and, strolling into the reporters' room to see what speeches there would be that night, found Enoch there. He bestowed upon him a friendly nod, and sat down cheerfully to the diary, drumming with strong fingers upon the desk. Then, with a sigh of ease, like one who has the day before him and no cares, he leaned back in his chair and considered the newcomer, who was reading. For once in a way Macdonald had slept well; his pale face had a certain clearness and the small dark eyes twinkled like a bird's.

The fellows had said of him that he was "a devil to work," and Enoch revered him. Macdonald denied that saying, as we deny all statements that are flattering. If eulogy was much persisted in, he laughed his flatterers to scorn, affirming that his natural disposition was idleness qualified with curiosity. To-day he would have said that he had come down early by way of indulging it. In the slang of the office, he was "miking."

But there were certain facts of Macdonald's career and habits that "daurna be disputet," and they accused him of modesty.

He had won his way from a reader's closet to the literary editorship; he wrote two long leaders almost every night; and once or twice a month, when the magazines came in, he might be seen going home at ten

Macdonald on falling in Love

o'clock in the morning, after a "day" of twenty hours. What but a passion for work should make a man do that, when there was not the least necessity to put in more than twelve or fourteen? Ireton was annoyed. It looked as if Macdonald wished to accuse the office publicly of under-staffing. Why should he make such a fuss of earning forty-five shillings a month for two columns of extracts? Ireton might also have said that it was bound to take some freshness out of the leaders, but that was no affair of his; and I suppose Macdonald, being tenacious, would have answered that it was precisely *for* his leaders, and not for the extracts, or even for the comment which pieced the extracts up, that he read so thoroughly.

However this be, he liked a burst of work; and one wonder was that health and cheerfulness withstood such bursts. But his bursts of exercise were great also. In the holidays, he went on walking tours with his wife, a schoolmistress of much character; they had been known to cover forty miles in a day; while on occasional fine Saturdays he would go the length of Wharfedale alone.

It was fortunate that no such extremes appeared in his written opinions. Macdonald was humorous about most things, to the point of being wisely philosophical; and this entitled him to respect as a writer. By his younger colleagues, however, he was admired more for a store of miscellaneous knowledge believed to be commensurate with human learning; and, indeed, in a man who had left school at thirteen years of age, a weaver's lad, his erudition was prodigious and varied. Darbyshire called him the Walking Cyclopædia; the staff consulted him in that capacity. It was nothing against his fame that, when he did not know a thing, he knew where to turn for information.

Barbara West

Macdonald now began to sound the young reporter. "I suppose you did the fire last night."

His tone was friendly, but your tyro, when not unpromising, is apt to be diffident. Enoch owned the soft impeachment with a tremor.

"Mph!" Macdonald said, and took a pinch of snuff. "I thought I saw a new hand in it. There's nobody here who would have done it just that way."

"I'm afraid it reads rather—hurriedly," said Enoch.

"All the better, all the better." He was busy with a red bandana. "The point is, one gets a picture of the scene; one wants that fireman to come out all right, with the youngster." He laughed pleasantly.

"I'm glad of that," said Enoch. "He was a *fine* chap. You should have seen him afterwards, coughing the smoke up and wiping the smart from his eyes. He made his face all streaky. And he didn't seem to think he had done anything great at all! He just stood and swore, and in a minute he bustled away to work again."

Macdonald approved each detail with a nod, quietly radiant. "Ay, you see, you were just wanting to tell the British public what kind of stuff there's in the world. No doubt he was a fine chap. He didn't risk his life, you bet, because the Corporation pay him eighteen shillings a week. You didn't write half a column about it because Mr Smith is going to pay you something more than that. No, sir," he perorated, "there's nothing good done in this world for the mere extraneous reward, however inadequate. The reward's in doing it!"

"Why, yes; I suppose it is," said Enoch. Together with the praise, Macdonald's Scottish accent and grim smile encouraged him. Besides, he had not expected to hear an editor say "You bet"; slang in the *Chronicle* office served by way of relaxation, and American slang was new in favour.

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"Oh, be sure of it," Macdonald chuckled. "That's where the designing capitalist comes in."

Enoch saw an opening. Social politics were recon-dite. "Paine says," he remarked, "that it is the righteous who ought to inherit the earth."

It was something of a shock, but Macdonald recovered. "Which is highly considerate of Mr Paine," he said, with that dry, short cough of his, "seeing that he himself has no great opinion of righteousness. . . . But, if I remember rightly, you're lodging with him."

Enoch said no, he had got other lodgings that morning. Somehow he was loth to tell Macdonald why.

"Oh!" And Macdonald, who had looked at him keenly, took another pinch of snuff, which made his eyes water. The opening was declined. "Ah, well," he mused, "Paine's not exactly a cheerful person. He seems to have missed his way when he was very young. . . . Falling in love," he added, "is the critical thing, after all."

"I didn't know," said Enoch, thinking of Paine with a touch of compunction.

"Oh, yes, Paine's quite a tragedy. Paine's view of womankind is—"

Macdonald shook his head and left the sentence unfinished.

"When a man falls in love," he said, resuming—"I mean when he *does* fall in love, when he discovers there's only one woman in the world soberly worth thinking about, and that's the woman he's going to marry, mind you—he gets the hang of things in general. He don't worry about who's going to inherit the earth, or any such detail. However, I guess you'll find that out," he ended, smiling. "The important thing is, to fall in love with the right woman, and keep what some melancholy Frenchman called one's illusions."

Barbara West

So might an oracle smile, and not more successfully bewilder a lover's mind. "You think," said Enoch, guessing his way, "that's a man's—character—depends on the girl he falls in love with?"

Macdonald started. "The general development of his character," he said: "the character itself is there when he meets her, you see. No, what I meant was, that if he does fall in love, if he can love a woman manfully, he don't need to have learned any philosophy; that's bound to come of it; so long as he keeps in that state of mind he's all right, he'll play the hero and the gentleman."

He shifted his chair a little, wakening up to the need of a demonstration. In those days the leader-writer, however humorous, was a man of dogmatic habits.

"Put Paine out of your mind," he said. "We don't know his case well enough; and, of course, you can only judge a man as you find him, with all the charitable reservations you are able to invent for him. You can't judge him, in fact; you can only tell whether you like him or not, and what you like in him, or dislike."

"I don't like him at all," said Enoch.

"Never mind," Macdonald laughed. "I didn't imagine that you would like Paine much; but I'm not going to discuss Mr Paine. The importance of falling in love—that's the subject, if you don't mind. Also the sheer hopelessness of anything short of it, including all unnatural prudery, that unawares agrees with animal natures to look upon love as if it were an affair of selfish gratification. There! I propose we brace our minds up to that."

It might be a sort of mirthful challenge, but Enoch found him formidable. He said that he did not quite see.

"No!" laughed Macdonald again. "It isn't to be

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expected, anyway. That's just my case—our unpropitious, tacit way of bringing young folk up. They're left to find it out for themselves : which wouldn't matter so much, I grant, if they didn't hear a good deal of foolishness before the time came. Here are you—twenty-one or two, I suppose—”

“Twenty.”

“Well, twenty—old enough,” he twinkled, “to be monstrous happy when a pretty girl looks your way, and so you should be, so you should be. I'll undertake to say that this humble individual is the first person who ever said to you that to fall in love successfully is the greatest thing a man has to do, the beginning of everything well done at all in the world. Come, now !”

“No,” said Enoch, abashed but interested ; “nobody has said just that.” Confident assertion made him answer with a show of preciseness.

“Ay, but it is just that. Now, observe. Consider what instincts the Maker of us implanted,” said Macdonald ; “impulses we must obey. This is instinctive, mind you ; no ingenious obscurantist can make it out to be acquired, because, obviously, it was there from the start.”

The door creaked. Ireton, looking in, had heard Macdonald deep in the single subject with respect to which he seemed objectionably serious, and had promptly vanished.

Macdonald paid no need. He had the same kind of relish for exposition that some other men have for demonstrating chess problems.

“Is there any other instinct,” he asked, “that you can be so sure of counting on ? It is commonly the first that moves the human being deeply ; is there another, anything more than animal and less than religious, more than hunger and thirst and the other

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instincts of self-preservation, that isn't comprehended in it? . . . You haven't thought. Well, I'll give you a week to find one, any way; and perhaps you will take it from me in the meantime that nobody else *has* found one."

Enoch laughed, with an uncomfortable feeling that he was handled like a child being taught to walk between chairs.

"Very well; my point meantime is that it's not only important that way, but very much more than a physical affair. Every decent person knows it is; but scarcely anybody sees how much more. This thing," he affirmed, sinking his voice on the word, "is burked, in fact . . . I'm hanged if people don't behave as if they were ashamed of God Almighty. Believe me, Mr Watson, this attraction of the sexes, when nothing spoils it, is *nobil*; and nothing does spoil it, half the time, but that absurd behaviour. You may be sure that God Almighty knew what He was doing. It isn't simply an instinct for the preservation of the race, shared with all the lower animals; it engenders the purest kind of moral emotion. Instead of fostering that, and counting on it, we avoid the subject as if it were shameful. In that higher state of the mind, sir, that reverence and devotion for each other of the sexes, there is the germ of all right feeling and thinking and doing; and what we've got to work for is just everything that will keep it unsullied, and keep it *there*."

He spoke with increasing warmth, but part of the thought went over Enoch's head; for so much hard pugnacity behind the mask of a genial pale face won for the orator more respect than for his dissertation.

"Ay, it's a big subject," Macdonald ended, falling back with a sigh before it. "It's the whole subject of civilisation—the hull desperate, sempiternal subject. . . .

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But there's no reason why *you* should worry about it yet awhile," he brightened presently, "unless you want to write social leaders. . . . Time enough, in fact, when you begin that hopeless kind of gentle ink-spilling. The chief thing for you, I imagine, is in the meantime not to write shorthand too well."

For a youngster proud of his stenographic skill, the editor's humour was more difficult than his philosophy. Candour appeared to shine in his eyes; but such advice as not to do one's work well was startling. "How do you mean?" said Enoch.

"Why, that shorthand-writing is the worst paid work in journalism. But good shorthand-writers are rare, sir, rare. Do your mere mechanical work too well, and they'll just keep you at that as long as they can."

He stood up, hesitated, took a last pinch of snuff, checked an impulse to offer the box, and put it in his pocket. Then Macdonald felt, it would seem, that he ought to apologise for preaching. "Twelve years ago, Mr Watson," he said, with a lowering of the voice for emphasis, "I was a reader's boy, at five shillings a week. Being ambitious to swagger, I believe, I taught myself Latin and read other things omnivorously, between the proofs. Nine years ago, they thought I should be cheap at twenty-one shillings a week in the sub-editor's room. To me"—he smiled—"that was a fortune, mark you. Very well. When I'd written a few leader-notes and a leader for nothing, they discovered one day that it would be cheaper still to let me write 'em all. You see, I had had the cheek once to bring the paper out, on a great occasion for me, when the editor broke down; the senior sub let me do it, sir; so when they wanted a new editor—well, I was handy. Cheek, Mr Watson—pure cheek; the cheek to use your chance when it comes. Take my advice and beware of modesty."

Barbara West

With this, being himself a modest egotist, Macdonald got out of the room. The final word, however, he found he had still to say ; and while Enoch, discomposed by this odd sardonic frankness, was still collecting his wits, he put in his head again at the dark doorway.

"Should never have done it, Mr Watson," he said, "*but for a woman !*"

To the dazzled junior he had very effectively introduced himself. Dogmatism of a confident insight was agreeable in a man so friendly ; it happened that, in all his narrow life, no man older than himself had paid Enoch Watson the compliment of appealing to his intelligence with a new idea ; and the friendliness touched him like an honour. He was Macdonald's proud disciple from that day. But as to his own practice of Macdonald's gospel, he had already been in love a score of times, as we have seen ; and for the new experience of that troublesome plight now threatening, it was to prove more than all the others crucial.

Meantime he built upon it eagerly, with a new sense of gravity steadying fearful hopes.

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTERY OF JOURNALISM

THE daily making of newspapers is a greater mystery to the novice, who watches it and does his little part, than, I suppose, it can be to the man in the street who gives a passing thought to it. For, let him watch never so keenly, the novice will hardly see a tithe of what is done; nor, until years have passed, and he has once at least with his own hand done everything, can he perfectly know the manner of doing it. There are many workers, the work of almost all is accomplished in silence, all do not come in contact with each other, and, if your novice be romantic, there is not one but appeals in some sort to his imagination.

Enoch made the late calls for a month at Merchanton, and often found himself alone in the office toward midnight. It impressed him as a weird place. He considered that in all the more important rooms, some of which he had not seen, men's brains were busy: and he was as much alone, all the same, as in an empty house. He sat in the little, half-lit reporters' room, and heard the flame of his argand burner droning, and felt a kind of ghostly thrill.

The mystery was with him, too, first thing in a morning. You may be quite on friendly terms with a man, and yet bemused by the contemplation of his printed words. The type is like all other type; unless he is original and writes naturally you miss his voice and manner in it. What you get is disembodied mind at best; and it may be so unlike the man you see, that the

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process by which he produced it, the state of his consciousness, will seem as queer as hypnotism. Until our novice knew them well, and identified their work by little peculiarities, Enoch's nearest colleagues puzzled him for that reason. He was baffled by the difference between Paine and Paine's very sympathetic account of a small railway accident, between Darbyshire and a dull paragraph about the weather. It might have occurred to a brighter wit that they were not expressing themselves, but trying to write what was expected of them. Such demureness is impressive even upon the public.

But at least he saw his nearest colleagues writing, and knew what they did. He, in fact, did part of it, sharing the big reports of meetings. The mystery was, that much of the paper was produced like a nightly miracle, by means that he did not see at all. Ireton, and Macdonald, and the sub-editors, who somehow secretly achieved this wonder, were a sort of hierophants.

And the darkest of these was Ireton, who commonly wrote nothing, but was there in his inaccessible room early and late, and sometimes passed you in the corridor (dim even when the gas was lighted), walking erect, deliberate, with slippered feet, like a phantom nobody cared to challenge. It was half believed of Ireton that he knew beforehand all that went into the paper. He did know day by day, beyond a doubt, of every smallest thing that appeared therein. Make a slip in grammar, fall into a solecism, or spell a name wrongly, and the unhappy reporter was sure to find on his desk a dry notification of that fault, in a small, buff-coloured envelope. Ireton was hated for this by Paine as a living and separate conscience might be hated, being remorseless and impassive. The small, red-faced junior,

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whom nobody befriended much, would hide if he could when Ireton came his way; but the slippers were usually too much for him, and then the smooth, bass voice made him jump. Darbyshire liked his chief hardly better; he was the recipient of most of his favours. "Ah!" he would say, with an air of nonchalance, "another billy-do from Willie," and read it aloud,— 'Sir,—I prefer one thing *to* another, like it better *than* another.—W. I.'

Or this: "Mr John Darbyshire. Sir,—You have omitted to say by what court of law, or against whom, the 'damages' which seem to have been awarded for the fire last night were awarded in fact. Kindly explain this."

"Still bilious," Darbyshire might say, or misinterpret the initials, "W. I.—Worrying Idler"; but there were times when even Jack Darbyshire lost his temper—most divertingly—under the steady play of academic sarcasm. This upon Enoch, happily for him, had no such effect. He had, at any rate, been disciplined by the home training. But he was amazed that a man should read the whole paper every day with a lynx eye for the smallest details; and Ireton's distant manner seemed to imply such an awful infallibility that he had to be left inscrutable.

He was so as nearly as any man may be. Enoch saw furthest into him when he remembered the jesting of their first interview. In that quiet hour before midnight, he supposed him sunk in some deep effort of predestination, and, thus imagining, added many cubits to another man's stature. Ireton, among his chosen friends outside the office, was known for a man of few words, but these witty ones; for a bluff heartiness that was refreshing; and for his ability to sing a good song. Enoch had no inkling of their point of view. He heard

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the round, big voice one quiet afternoon troll out, "*And the land-lubbers lying down below, below, below!*" and marvelled that the Great Panjandrum (another epithet of Darbyshire's applying) should be so musical.

On Macdonald his thoughts might dwell with a less uncomfortable awe.

But what an air-drawn feat it was that Macdonald nightly compassed, the leading article in leaded bourgeois type, impenetrably wise, in an easy flow of impressive English! In the leaders, it is true, he heard the writer's voice and saw his manner: they had none the less the look of a separate product of intelligence, difficult to reconcile with Macdonald's quaintly-mannered modesty. Except as a clear product of intelligence, a kind of sublimation from the human retort, certain articles, for example, in which Disraeli was decried very finely would have been too great for any man with a red bandana "wipe" and an office coat so seedy. For there, beyond a doubt, was the great Disraeli politically naked, with not so much as a handkerchief—reduced, as it were, to the curl upon his forehead. It was wonderful, and perfectly delightful. When Enoch gave in copy to the sub-editors, and glimpsed Macdonald through an inner curtained doorway, writing, his respect for the sublimation process caused him to walk on tiptoe.

The novice with such a gift of appreciation is likely to do his own work well. Not suspecting it, Enoch had made an excellent impression; Ireton meant to keep him.

He grew less timid without abating reverence. The sub-editor-in-chief, a man named Penny, laid about his work with great energy and occasional clamour, dispelling the midnight silence. This more free-and-easy hierophant was a man who never came in to tea; at that

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time of day, he was said to dine mightily ; and Enoch, long made curious by his cries, viewed him first in his place, a young and strong-faced personage with a big nose, who slashed his way through correspondents' copy in a mood of invincible glee. A forlorn telegraph boy was whistling at the moment on the landing outside, in slow time, out of tune. Penny sprang out, upsetting his chair.

"Boy!" he roared ; then, along the corridor, "Nobody dead, is there? . . . Don't whistle, then," and so back to his blue pencil, swooping.

At other times, as you neared the room, his laugh surprised one like a cracker. "Oho, I like this!" he cried. He was scoring something out. The sulky man his colleague, Heap, neither raised his head nor so much as grunted. Macdonald, behind his curtain, might be imagined taking snuff for an aid to thought.

But the reporting staff rejoiced in Penny from afar. He was known to have danced a breakdown in the corridor once, at Ireton's door.

"Mr Penny," Ireton said on that occasion, looking out with an evil smile, "this is not a music-hall."

"Oh, no charge," said Penny.

Enoch had even a first lesson in sub-editing from him.

"Anything more to do?" Penny asked him about eleven o'clock one night. "Get these telegrams in order, there's a good fellow, then. Quick's you can."

So he sat down to a pile of red envelopes, turned out the flimsy sheets from them, and found these jumbled like a child's picture-puzzle, or rather several puzzles ; for some were headed "Gladstone," some "Reuter," and some "P.A. gen. evg.—" whatever that might mean—and, so far as he could see, there was neither a beginning nor an end of anything. Bits of Reuter's telegrams from

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half-a-dozen capitals of Europe, Gladstone's speech in broken sections, the rest a hopeless jumble of scraps, set his eager wits in a whirl.

"What have you got?" asked Penny presently; and Enoch could not tell him.

"But there's a lot of Gladstone," he ventured.

"Never mind; have you got him in sections?"

"They're not complete," said Enoch, gasping.

"Here with it!" and Penny, fitting it in with sheets on his own desk at one glance, fell to dashing in commas and full points. He did it at such a pace, it seemed impossible that he read what he was handling.

Telegraph boys coming in every minute, the envelopes multiplied on Enoch's hands; Penny constantly demanded the end of another section, and, when he did not get it, opened some of them himself; while the rejected Reuter and the "P.A. gen. evg." grew to a confused heap of which there seemed to be no hope at all. Enoch perspired with anxiety. But in an hour or less the supply slackened; the Gladstone had all been seen by Macdonald, and whistled up a little rattling hoist to the printers, in handfuls; whereupon Penny, then in the act of scribbling "summary," bade Enoch summarily "Be off with you!"

"Good-night," he said, "much obliged."

By some admirable chance the morning's paper of four pages came out orderly and calm as usual.

He saw the compositors every night, for after ten o'clock the one way out of the office took him through their room. It was said that comps. died fast, and this he believed very readily; the room had an atmosphere so foul and hot that he could not remain in it.

Standing in long rows at their high desks, and wearing neither coats nor waistcoats, they worked, as it seemed to him, with a quite pathetic industry and

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cheerfulness. Many had green shades, screening their eyes from the direct flare of abundant gas-light. A low hum of conversation went among them, with now and then a laugh; there was always a sound of feet, too, men going to the "galleys" with their set type, and coming to the overseer's desk for more copy; and there were necessary cries above this quiet hubbub—"Who's got 3 of Macdonald?" and the like; or the overseer's bell, and his "Less noise, gentlemen, please," which brought comparative silence. The long room had a glass roof upon low rafters, at some time white-washed, and now discoloured with running moisture; but the roof and soiled walls were in shadow, the lights being masked about; so that in a general gloom the array of white shirts and faces and bare incessant arms was chiefly seen. They earned twice his pay, these men, but he did not grudge it them.

Being kept one night until the small hours by an election meeting, he finally saw the paper printed.

This was fascinating. First, the making of a *papier-mâché* mould, beaten with hard brushes into the fine surface of a page of type, and afterwards baked dry in an oven. Then from this mould the casting of a metal plate, in the shape of a half cylinder; and he saw with astonishment that although it was thinner than pasteboard the *papier-mâché* sheet withstood a weight of molten metal, and neither burned nor yielded, but left its impress crisp upon the cooling plate, ready the next minute to be imposed with other plates upon the printing cylinder, and there locked fast with lateral clips. The big new machine itself, when all the plates were on, confused him with an eager and sudden roar, and with the sight of something done that he did not understand. Many unequal wheels kept pace all over it, with cranks in a constant beat of dissimilar movement.

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He agreed with the Glasgow engineer that it was a stirring spectacle, resembling the division of human labour. Here and there an eccentric rod, starting to help with a fuss and standing still again, tickled his sense of humour. He watched the pour of printed papers, nine or ten thousand in all, and thought what a host of people read his long reports and polished paragraphs, and did not know that an obscure youngster wrote them.

But it was not the office, nor any thing or person in it, that mainly kept him cheerful. It was hard work for twelve or fourteen hours a day, work done in very lively spurts, with the town going wild as polling day drew near. He almost forgot Barbara, forgot a great part of his antipathy to Paine. And when the strenuous time was ended, and Ireton, glad that it came in his way to seem benevolent, had asked him if he cared to stay, he looked back upon events of fourteen days ago with the same indifference as if they were six months old.

CHAPTER XI

BARBARA'S VIEW OF MARRIAGE

It happened one fine day that Enoch Watson stood at the office door talking with Macdonald, when Barbara passed on the other side. Him he had met coming in, and had stopped to show him results of the last day's polling, just to hand and posted on the window. There was nobody to read them, the election being already won.

"But how did you know so well that Gladstone would be in?" he had asked.

"Divination," said Macdonald, stolidly. "Geomancy."

"No, but really."

Macdonald smiled; this innocence was flattering. "I didn't know at all," he said. "I prophesied to keep people's peckers up. When you have to fight a man, it's a considerable help to believe religiously that he's going to get licked."

Then Enoch saw his sweetheart. Busy chattering, with her pretty smile, she had overlooked him even in a quiet street; and her companion was Paine, who at every few paces laughed with a kind of spasmodic delight—like an old man's, he thought. When the frightened lad withdrew his eyes, Macdonald had the look of waiting for some reply, but he turned aside at once to go indoors.

"So may all our enemies perish," he said.

Enoch walked away stunned. He came to himself a little in the outskirts of Merchanton, not knowing by

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what way he had got there. It was as if he awoke from a dream to discover that it was true; and, as he looked about in the empty road, such a chill of grief shook him that he put out a hand for support to the wall by the roadside.

A precious "hero," it must be owned!—to be so strangely unmanned, so out of reason shaken by a base mistrust. Good courageous lovers must disown him: "True love," they will say, "is a greater thing than natures such as his can know." Happy dogmatism! The zeal of generous souls that never loved unwisely and too well accredits it. But, I pray you, remember his old wound. This shows you how it must have gaped once.

Between assuring himself that there was no one near, and trying to think if he had any work that should be done, the poor alarmist regained a miserable composure. He drew a full breath and stiffened his limbs, with the idea that, if she could like such a fellow as Paine, he was done with her. Trying to despise her for it, he supposed himself quite calm; and so he walked on a little way and down a lane, seating himself on a fallen tree there. Why had he been so mortified?

At the recollection of Paine's boast, for which he had struck him, a flush mounted upon his forehead.

The boast was horribly true, and Barbara's easy manners made a fool of him. Against Paine his anger began to burn again. With a lively imagination he meditated such a thrashing that he was himself half afraid of it. The secret bitter fact moreover was, that he believed this would avail nothing; Paine would seek to have his way clandestinely, and she would suffer him.

It occurred to him, common sense being not quite overthrown, that unless he could make Barbara like

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him better than Paine, his jealousy must look ridiculous too. He was not troubled with doubts of his ability to do that. But when he now asked himself whether he meant to marry her, a question fair to be answered first of all, he found the limits of his chivalry. The question was no pleasanter than a challenge. He had to assure himself first that he loved her, and all gave way when he could not say how much. After a time, he sought his way back to town, with no inspiration but to behave himself as usual—which was, indeed, the best he could do. Most of us, if we do not know, can imagine—

... what damned minutes tells he o'er,
Who doats yet doubts, suspects yet fondly loves ;

and Enoch Watson was near to being in that case.

To Paine, who must have seen him at the office door when they passed, he paid at tea no more attention than he had ever done since the quarrel. But with the tail of his eye he saw Paine comfortably fleering at him. The effect of much self-repression was in a day or two to make him think that he did not care ; and he repeated, more as a soothing form of incantation than because it sounded reasonable, the empty couplet—

If she be not fair to me,
What care I how fair she be ?

He was to find how much he cared presently. Having resolved to go home for the week-end, he booked on Saturday afternoon for Shepton, ran upon the platform at the last moment, and, getting into the train after the guard's whistle sounded, found himself in the same compartment with Barbara West.

He was immensely confused, but felt a great gush of pleasure, her beauty appeared so much rarer than he

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had remembered. She was half smiling, and she patted the seat, inviting him to a place beside her in the corner. With bliss he took it. Almost before he could sit down Barbara had asked him how far he was going, had cried out with delight because it was farther than her own destination, and had begun to tell him her business.

She talked in a pretty modulated voice just audible, making him feel like a confidant. "It's a nuisance travelling alone, isn't it? Every Saturday I've two pupils at Dingley—friends of my father when he was alive, so I can't very well put them off. Besides, they make quite a fuss of me—homely people, you know, but very kind to Barbara West, though for some reason mother doesn't like them. I suppose you are going to a football match?"

"Oh, we don't attend football matches, except the big ones," he explained. "But it's cricket now."

"Oh, yes, of course; I've seen them playing. It was funny we got into the same carriage. Ah! now I'm going to be cross. Why didn't you come to the Art Gallery? I was all by myself that day, quite melancholy."

"I couldn't," he said almost dolefully. "I'm very sorry. I had a meeting to do. I was melancholy too."

"Were you really? Very well, then, I shall forgive you this time." Dispensing that favour, she tapped him with her gloved hand on the knee. "But you mustn't be rude to Mr Armitage again. I like him very much."

"You mean the—" He wanted some description that should not offend her.

"The gentleman who met me there. He's very nice and very kind, although his people are awfully rich, I believe. You see, I've known him a long time."

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It was spoken lightly, but his hopes fell at it. "I thought it was he who was rude to me," he said.

"No, but he wasn't, really. It's only his manner; he's an officer in the Militia; you see, I know him. I wonder if we shall be coming back by the same train? Seven twenty-five mine is. Must you really go to Sheepton?"

Once more a little needlessly he took her seriously; and with little hesitation he put off the journey home to another week. "But you are on business," he first answered.

"Well, yes, of course," she said. "Still, they are only half-hour lessons. If you would like—"

"May I? There are boats on the river," he bethought him.

"Oh, do!" she begged. "There's a nice boy!" and settled herself more snugly in the seat.

It was almost as if she had nestled against him. During one delicious minute he lost his head; and the pleasure lingered like an effect of wine, flattering him. She had seemed by a little grateful glance to say that they were now good friends. Why was she so wishful to be kind?

He heard her prattling on, and scarcely took account of what she said, because the ripple of her lips itself was a pretty sound. He was but dimly aware of other people in the carriage. She and he were sequestered by the mere intimacy of her manner, like girls whispering secrets. He perceived a faint sweet perfume. Suddenly he said to himself, "I love her," and the lover's tenderness uplifted him. She seemed to have no thought of good or evil fortune, being happy.

"So you see I can get away nicely," she was saying, "and then we'll just amoose ourself. But you must promise not to rock the boat."

He laughed.

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"Oh, but you must. Say 'I promise,'" she commanded.

"I promise, if you wish it," said he, with a secret pleasure in the words. "But I can swim, you know."

"It doesn't matter," she nodded gravely. "A gipsy once told me I should be drowned."

"But do you believe that?"

"M—I don't know. I daresay it was rubbish," she mused, and then with an affected decision added, "Barb'a West's going be careful, because she doesn't like nasty cold water."

She aped the child so well and prettily, even to the manner of sitting primly up and crossing one foot over the other to swing her legs, that it would have seemed the most natural thing in the world to kiss her. He could not do that, and he felt a smart, although he laughed again. She was so small and plump and fair-complexioned, like the type of child one makes a pet of; and yet she was a woman—delightfully free of pride, and simple. Indeed, Miss West wore a tiny bonnet, set very woman-like in a fulness of auburn hair, and the neatest kind of jacket to show her figure, and pretty green gloves and jewellery.

Of what she wore, however, he was hardly conscious. He would not have owned that it helped at all to form his impression of her; and he was only amused when, as they left the Dingley station, she said with a confidential nod, "I like your new suit."

"Do you?" he smiled. "I must tell Darbyshire. He took me to his own tailor; such a fuss as never was, he made. . . . I thought it looked—conspicuous."

"Oh, no!" she protested. "It's very quiet and nice. Jack always dresses well."

But Enoch's opinion of her own attire she had to ask him for, and it was well that his answer—he thought

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she looked "lovely"—made up in enthusiasm what it lacked in technicality. Encouraged by it, she talked dress all the way to her first place of call. It flattered him, no doubt, to be told so much in a purely personal matter; but so that she talked at all, he did not care whether it was dress or trigonometry.

"Now," she said, "you must go and have a—a game of billiards or something; and you can be here again at—let me see"—she studied a pretty gold watch gravely—"at four o'clock, say. My other place is only five gates away. You're sure you don't mind?"

He found no need for any such factitious amusement as billiards. All he desired was to be outside of the little town awhile, so that he should not seem to his fellow-creatures too well pleased for no visible cause. The strangeness of his high good fortune he accepted. It was her way, he knew very well, but what a dear, delightful way! At any rate she liked him a little. He passed an hour among the hillside woods romantically.

Barbara did a little like him, and it was her "way," her happy occupation daily, to be fascinating; so far, he had not mistaken her. But there was hardly a hope in his breast, new-fledged or still in embryo, that might not break its wings before he came to know her well. She and Enoch were unlike natures. A child to let desire of love so innocently show, Barbara West was yet unromantic; a child very charmingly good-natured, she had been a little spoiled; and she played off her pretty tricks of manner, bestowed her favours, with a self-centred satisfaction. Kind she was, very charmingly; but of love in any foolish boy or man that could seriously disturb him she had no understanding. Some experience of it had annoyed her, ruefully embarrassed her, startled her in more than one case profoundly: it had

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not changed her point of view. What it had done, and this remarkably, was to sharpen her tact. She had infinite nice ways of managing her admirers, and at once she divined of Enoch Watson that he was a "biddable boy." To be so much admired by him was very pleasant, but not at all bewildering as in the case of maids unpractised. And you are to remark that she was very honest. She marked the glow of eager worship with a simple intention to "put him right at once for his *own* sake." He was, she felt quite sure, a *nice* boy, and if she made it plain that he was not to talk nonsense they might be very good friends. She smiled through her lessons thinking so. Desire of love was sweet in her, though she insisted on giving the rose another name.

The lessons over, she had a little chat after each of them—not to let it be thought that she had other business pressing or to make him vain—and so kept Enoch waiting. He saw her come hurrying towards him with an innocent face of solicitude as at the Art Gallery; and if he had waited hours this would have been reward enough. She was awfully sorry; it had seemed as if she could not get away. Had he enjoyed his game of billiards? Prettily-spoken apology and question came in a breath.

"I've enjoyed thinking of you," he answered.

"Oh, but you're not to say those things," she said; and perhaps she blushed a little. It was the first gallant speech he had ventured on outright, and, being unexpected, it pleased her. "Now, what shall we do? Won't it be too chilly on the water?"

"If you think so."

She was, in fact, so unromantic as to be hungry. After a pause, "Take me to a nice confectioner's, and you shall have some tea!" she said quickly.

He came down from the clouds in confusion. "Oh,

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yes! I was wondering; I thought perhaps—but you don't mean not to let—you don't mean to pay for *me!*”

The serious boy! How she liked him for blundering so!

“Come along,” she said. “Of course I do, if you'll be good.” And then, seeing him stand with open eyes, red-faced—“Oh, how absurd we are,” she cried. “I don't mind a bit *who* pays; Barb'a West is famishing. There!”

He had to laugh then, and she stepped along by his side with a pert complacency. It did not occur to him that she was droll to save his feelings, and he was flattered by her making free with him. In the shop—where, to her plain discomfiture, they were served on a table covered with oilcloth—she also relieved him without ceremony of the task of ordering things. That was an embarrassment avoided. He had himself no notion how to go about such business.

She talked nicely to the nervous Yorkshrewoman, who could not understand why forks and spoons were wanted with small fruit pies, and she ate with a daintiness such as he had never seen, although the fork was a bone-handled meat fork, and distressed her more than the oilcloth did. The tea was flavourless, the butter bad; he saw that nothing was fit to set before her, and grew more nervous than the shopwoman. Barbara's way, however, was to pout and put up with things. Buttoning her glove, she pushed out a little white wrist towards him with a sigh, and smiled in his eyes, asking so for help. Also she was nice with the woman in going.

“Now,” she said, as they came into the street, “take me a walk. Take me where it isn't all big pebbles;” for in Dingley there was a good deal of old-fashioned

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pavement—a torture to all but the townsfolk, who wore clogs.

He took her across the river and up the steep hill to the Bel Rock. She had his arm for the climb, taking it naturally while he feared to offer it. Her talk was all about her pupils, and other pupils less or more troublesome, and her engagements in Merchanton, and what success she had had with audiences. She was anxious, it seemed, to have his opinion about things. "You are a newspaper man, of course," she said, "and besides, I'm sure you wouldn't say what you don't think, would you?" It was not his habit to do so; but in twenty minutes he had ventured as many warm encouragements on matters quite outside his knowledge. She seemed content.

"I'm so glad you think as you do," she said, "because I wanted your real opinion; people are so ready to say nice things, aren't they?—and mother isn't musical. She hates the sound of music; I'm sure she does. You see"—the girl paused—"first she didn't like me to play in public; but why should dad have spent so much money on me, keeping me at the Academy? And I got the gold medal; did you know? Oh, yes—and poor dad was within a fortnight of dying then; this is my stepfather I have now. Poor old dad, he was pleased. . . . And then mother objected to my taking pupils—as if you could be too good for that! Even the biggest players take some pupils, you know."

He saw her eyes moist. "Well, of course they do," he burst out, "or how could music be taught?"

"But Barb'a West can earn her own living," said she, very cheerfully.

She was beauty brave in distress, and her simple intimate story knighted him. He pressed her arm as they mounted. How dear she was then! Never had he

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thought to be so sure of happiness as he would be if he won her.

The Bel Rock is the greatest of a line of grey crags that buttress up a moorland plateau. From the level top of it, swept in all seasons by the winds, one looks far out a little dizzily over the valley. Barbara would not stand there, although there is the space of a table top. They sat at the foot of the rock instead, where the hill falls clear away; and Enoch saw the flight of birds below them, and a waving of tree-tops. From that high region of ling and screes some of the roofs of Dingley were visible beneath the wood, in a shadow which the hill cast over them; and beyond this shadow a sunlit rising ground, away to the horizon.

"This is great," he said. "Better than Merchanton." Nor was he disappointed when she did not care to admire it, her thoughts racing busily on.

"I ought not to talk about mother really; but, of course, you won't repeat what I said. Somehow I put so much confidence in you, you are nice and serious. Do you know, I have to practise with the mute on; I'm *never* sure of my tone in public, and tone is just everything. What do you think of my violin? Dad gave eighty pounds for it."

"I thought you got wonderful tone."

"Yes, it has a fine tone; he believed it was a Strad., but, of course, it can't be that, so cheap, can it? Did you know I played for Patti once?"

"Really! Did you? What did she say?"

"Oh, at a concert, I mean; *m—m*, and got my encore all right, a real one; they all agreed it was one. . . . It wasn't till she married Mr Carton that mother turned so queer. I think," she said gravely, "that's why I don't like him. Have you seen him? . . . Oh, well, he's a nasty big p'liceman man."

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Enoch laughed; she was delightful. "But not a policeman really?" he said.

"N—I think he sold something in the wool trade, called noils," she answered. "Somefin greasy."

The baby-talk was what he listened for, though everything more sober and wise about her pleased his judgment. It scarcely seemed an affectation, that drollery, because even in repose her mouth had the mould of a happy simper, being a doll's mouth, no less artless and pretty. And her conversation appeared an unmistrustful showing of her real self to him; he was treated like a playmate, at the age of innocence and pleasant pretty ways. The sobriety and wisdom warned him, indeed, to be of good behaviour with a princess; but all about her breathed endearment.

While they partly told each other what their lives had been, the hills grew rosy and the valley grey; birds began their evensong in the wood below them, and upon Barbara, no longer too vigilant, a pleasant mood came. Her talkativeness, a defence against importunities that might assail her, was forgotten in content, and in a sense of well-being that let her listen to the birds. Enoch lay beside her, listening too. She felt very kindly towards him, for he had been entirely good; he did not want even her hand to hold.

When he now looked up at her, she would have liked to give it him. His eyes said that he knew she was happy.

It was only when he began to talk very seriously indeed that Barbara had to "set him right." In the midst of it he asked her—it was really funny, but she had to be serious too—he asked her shyly if she had ever been a bridesmaid.

"Yes, once I was," said Barbara. "But mustn't talk about 'at. 'Tisn't lucky. Besides, Barb'a West never goin' to get married, either."

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He laughed.

"No. Sha'n't," she said, and held up her chin.

"But we're not all nasty big policeman men."

"Don't care."

"But what a strange thing to say," he said soberly, concealing a fear. "If you were not so pretty—"

She turned her face away, and he stopped.

"Why do you think you won't marry?" he faltered.

"I don't fink we'd better sit here," she said, "'cos it's gettin' cold;" and she made a little shudder.

"Oh, don't let us go yet. I'm not cold a bit," he told her, and, scrambling to his feet, he slipped out of his dustcoat. "Let me put this round your shoulders."

"No, I'm sure you sha'n't!" she said, flushing up with pleasure. "Foolish boy!"

"But if you're cold and I'm not!"

"I'm not cold!"

"I saw you shiver."

Disregarding all she said, he happed the coat about her. What pretty hair she had, and how he grudged to cover up the smooth, full neck!

"No, it's too good of you," she protested. "I'm not a bit pleased." But as he stood crestfallen, she suddenly held out the coat on the side nearest him, while keeping the other side round her. "You can have half of it," she said.

How awkwardly he got down beside her was perhaps a thing to smile at. He felt her hand come lightly about his neck, giving him the lappel to hold, and had it absurdly stayed there he would scarce have been more confused. But Barbara withdrew it, folding her arms. "There!" she said. "But"—quick as thought—"you mustn't kiss me! You've got to be *velly sensible*."

Now for this kind of indulgence—let a girl bestow it never so lightly—the boy must pay a price; and the

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price is great or small as his nature is, not as the thing paid for. It is true that she cannot measure it; but let not the boy think to cheat her, for that part of the price which he withholds shall turn base metal in his hands. Happy, unhappy Enoch accepted all in good faith, with only a sense of being made ridiculous, his worship painfully belittled.

"Why do you say you won't marry?" he asked her. By way of being "very sensible" he was willing to talk as if nothing had happened; but oh, his pulses gave the lie to that pretence most sweetly.

She had many sober reasons, if none that were wise ones. "*Well*," she said, reflecting, "because I don't want to be married. . . . Because I couldn't come nice walks with you. Now!"

"But if—suppose *I* could marry you," he pressed with a boy's boldness.

Her ear was waiting for that. "Sha'n't suppose," she said.

And he, "Oh, Barbara!"

Whereupon she mocked him prettily. "What a great big sigh! I don't fink you're sensible at all, so there!"

"But you are so beautiful," he made excuse; and, no longer master of his fate, "Barbara!" he whispered, "I love you!"

The big words were a ravishment. Even as they passed his lips the boy was aware of peril in them. That he should say them, or speak at all of his emotion, was what he had not debated or foreseen; her own behaviour drew the avowal.

"Now you were going to kiss me!" she cried, sitting up away from him; and as to kiss her was for him at least more than to say that he loved her, the boy saw no evasion in this wariness.

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"Won't you?" he pleaded.

"What?"

"Let me kiss you."

She sat demurely still, her lips betraying a smile, but her eyelids drooping. "No," she said; "sha'n't be friends."

He lifted her dainty hand and kissed the glove.

Then she opened her eyes, and another kind of smile flashed out of them, blinding him. There was liking in it as well as merriment. "But you mustn't talk about marriage, you nice boy," she said, laying the hand lightly on his arm, "because I want us to be just brother an' sister, you know. And then," she said, withdrawing the hand to fold it with the other in her lap, "I'll like oo ever so much."

Did she mean it, then? Under the light manner there was a singular fixed intention that dismayed him. He made no answer. He flung himself amongst the ling with his face upon his arms; and she saw him shaken. Thereupon Barbara sat a while with a troubled face, growing red, and at last hitched a little nearer him. She touched his shoulder.

"Ah, don't!" he cried, and suddenly sobbed outright and bitterly.

She still sat very rueful, and wondered what to do if he would not be comforted. She was greatly relieved when he caught her hand to kiss it again. After that he kissed it repeatedly. But he lay a long time waiting for the tears to dry, because he would have been ashamed to wipe his face.

"Did you look up the trains?" she asked at last. She spoke tenderly, to show him she was sorry.

"No," he said, "but there are plenty. . . . Did you mean that?"

"What, dear?"

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Dear! It was very dear to be so called by her, at least.

"About not marrying."

"Yes, but I think I like you better than anyone," she told him. "Yes, I mean it." She ventured again to lay her hand on his arm, even firmly. "I'm really-
truly very sorry. You will always have me, you know; and sometimes we can come back to Dingley if—if you like. Please don't be miserable. Don't! To please *me*." She said "To please me" quite brightly. "Will you? Don't, and I'll kiss you better!" Upon the word she bent over him, and lightly and soberly touched his cheek with her lips.

He lay a moment longer, and then got upon his feet and held out his hand to her. "Shall we go?" said he.

"Ees. Better go," she said a little over readily. . . . "Wasn't that an awful little shop? I'm pleased I didn't talk nasty. . . . You're forgetting your overcoat."

They walked in strained silence awhile, and then she asked him, cheerfully, "You're sure you're not angry with me?"

"Oh, no," he answered.

"Good boy," said Barbara, with a renewal of the little pressure upon his arm. "See the lamps popping up. They seem to light themselves, don't they?"

CHAPTER XII

AN EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES

As to one thing Barbara was right—she had nothing to fear from him; he had set her very high. Unconsciously she had bared her purity, Nature's purity within her, and he revered that with his whole heart. Their intimate hour had also filled him with respect for what he thought of as her strength of mind; so completely, that when he parted from her there was not an ember of hope left alive in his breast. This, indeed, was more than she desired; but at the click of her mother's gate as she turned away, and the sound of her careless feet tripping up the garden path, a little smart of wounded pride came to rally him from bondage. He felt that she had made too light of his devotion. The scene being recalled, his cheeks on a sudden burned; it was all too humiliating; and he thought just then that he would not very much care if he saw her no more.

But his morning thoughts were dew-bright. He awoke remembering the contact and sweet freshness of her beauty, the miraculous touch of her kiss, her pity; and he started up, with the certainty that she had liked his love-making. Oh, she was made for love! She could not always put him off, and he so full of love, so utterly sincere.

Dressing, he pondered once or twice upon the reason she had given for refusing him, and scouted it. It was a reason without reason. Why should she have resolved not to marry? There was something behind that: so

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much, with marvellous sagacity, he divined quite clearly. But what was it? That it might seem less to him than to her did not occur to Enoch. Some time after breakfast the idea came to him with a shock that possibly she wanted someone else. Suspicion pointed to Darbyshire, who appeared to slight her; and to Darbyshire, brilliant and lovable beyond rivalry, he conditionally resigned her.

He endeavoured even to be glad in his misery. Sure that Darbyshire would make her happy, he joined their hands with emotion. And thereupon he must see his friend at once; friendship required that it should feast upon the man for whom he made this willing sacrifice. But the interview went otherwise than he at all foresaw, and had another kind of consequence. To begin with, Jack was in his cheeriest vein, and that was death to sentiment.

"Hullo!" cried he. "Thought you were at Sheepton." He himself was unshaven, and principally clad in a shabby dressing-gown.

"I came back last night," faltered Enoch, who was unprepared with a form of explanation. "I happened to get out—I mean, to get into the same carriage with Miss West, and we—she had—I brought her home afterwards."

"Good man," said Jack, with a sprightly indifference. "Glad to see you again at the Insectarium. Take any chair you please except the sofa; cigarettes behind the clock. Stay to dinner! . . . Don't hesitate, but do it!" and he pulled the bell.

"Thanks, I will," said Enoch. "There's nothing at my place specially cooked for me."

The landlady appeared, smiling eagerly, a faded little woman who openly admired her lodger.

"Gentleman to dinner, Mrs Metcalf," said he. "Good young man, named Watson, late for chapel."

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"Oh, Mr Darbyshire, don't!" said the woman, ogling.

"Is he all right?"

"Why, of course; any friend of yours—"

"Right-O!" said Darbyshire, turning from her.

"Welcome to this humble roof, young sir. Excellent woman that," he added when she was gone. "Dress me in a morning if I'd let her. Scents all my shirts and reads my letters. Bought me a musical box, egad, because I'm young and lonely. Look at it!"

There was the musical box, beyond a doubt; and there was Jack Darbyshire, as handsome as a picture even in his old dressing-gown.

"Goes like a clock, my boy, and never drops a note," he said. "Cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer and other kinds of music. I've boiled eggs by it. Also it scares the cat away, and now there isn't a flea in the place. Used to be lots. Got to find a new name for the digs; think I shall call 'em *The Deaf Man's Delight*; '*Insectarium*' is *played out*."

Laughing, Enoch asked, "Why do you wind the thing up?"

"Never do," said Darbyshire, imperturbable, "except when I'm going out. She sees to that, my boy. She winds it up when I ring for shaving water, and gives it another turn with the bacon and eggs. Makes the home happy for me of an evening, too—when I'm spared from the nasty office. Say, I want a powerful magnet, to slip down behind it! How's that? Any good, think? I don't want to damage the works; sort of burglary, wouldn't it? Not nice."

"I should tell her I didn't care for it."

"Can't!" he screamed. "Said I liked it! Killed myself with kindness. '*Kind words can never die*'—*that's one of the tunes!* See what a mess I'm in!"

He was talking quite loudly enough for the woman to

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hear him, and Enoch said so; whereupon he threw himself down on the sofa and waved his heels about. "No matter," he said next moment, sitting up. "Let's be happy while we can; she daren't wind it up on Sundays. How's Barbara?"

"That's what I don't quite know," said Enoch, humorously, and wished at once that he had not answered so. For Darbyshire had to find his meaning; and between chaff and shrewd questioning he was brought to tell his story out in five minutes. He did so with reservations, hoping to shield Barbara; by his way of it, she had given him no encouragement, and of course, the detail was for no man. But he had to deal with a wide-awake wit that knew both him and her; and Darbyshire, sympathetic, wished to warn him.

"Ah!" said he. "Little sinner!"

Enoch had not meant to complain in any sense. "I think," he said, flushing, "I haven't quite let you see how kind she was."

Darbyshire started. "I beg your pardon, old chap," he said seriously. "She's a nice girl, that's a fact. Go in and win, dear boy."

Ah! if it were possible. "The only thing is—" began Enoch, after a pause. "What makes her say she won't marry? It seems so odd."

"Doesn't it?"

Another pause.

"What do you think about it?"

"I? Can't say. . . . Fact is, I'm the Manx fox in the fable; lost my tail—proud of the little stump."

A nervous glance went between them. Enoch sat looking into the fire, his heart failing him; Darbyshire coughed, fidgeted, went over suddenly to his pipe-rack, and made a fuss of blowing through the pipe he chose.

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Said Enoch at last, however, "Perhaps she likes you still, Jack. Why did you give it up?"

"Puzzled!" Darbyshire answered. "Losing my pecker and doing no good. Yes, I believe she likes me all right. Calls me her brother Jack, in fact. But strictly between ourselves, old man, I'm a bit gone on a little girl who likes me better, 'way down at Nottingham. Dear soul! singing in church now like an angel."

Fair or not to Barbara, Enoch had to ask, "What puzzled you?"

"Just what puzzles you this minute, old chap! Rummet girl you've met, and nicest, isn't she? Can't tell whether she's a new kind of flirt or just a little maid from school? I couldn't. Might keep dolls—so 'innocent though knowing,' as the showman said. Treats you nicely; no chance against it. . . . I don't mind telling you, old man, that I tried hard; put in the best I knew. Lost about a stone o' weight in six months; went off my feed and got low, crying in a morning while I put my socks on. Monomania, my boy! . . . Still, here we are, sound and hearty. Good old Providence! sent me for a fortnight to the Isle of Man and made a cure of me."

Enoch was much cast down. He said presently, "It's as if you could *play* at being in love."

"You can," said Darbyshire. "Very popular game, in fact. Played it myself a good deal."

"I mean," said Enoch, "you can't if you are in earnest;" which was a truism.

"Ah! The game's up then. Other party's got the bulge on you. But, say, you don't mean to tell me this is your first little affair, E."

"Well, no"—he blushed—with a laugh. "But I—Most of the others were girls I never— One was a girl I never spoke to even!"

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"Never spooned any girls you knew?"

"Not spooned them; no, I don't think you could say 'spooned.' I've had fun with girls, of course; and there was one— In a little place like Sheepton— Oh, bother, I can't tell you, it's too silly. I suppose you'd call me shy."

"I'm the shyest man in Old England," cried Darbyshire with open eyes.

Enoch laughed out heartily.

"Thought you'd laugh; but I am. I know what you mean exactly. Never told your love; patience on a monument business. My boy, I had twenty sweethearts—from the tender age of seven up to manhood; fed on my damask cheek every time." Darbyshire lit his pipe. "Needn't mind telling me one little bit. Do you good." And he presently added sagely that Barbara was a good girl to practise on, any way; wouldn't lead him astray. "Take my tip," said he, "and never play the game with a girl not so good as yourself. Red light!—danger! Must play fair, of course; but in a case like that, whoever gets the bulge, the other *can't* play fair. See? 'Tisn't a fair game at all."

"How do you mean, 'not so good'?"

"Girl you wouldn't marry. . . . Don't see?"

"I don't think I quite see—what you mean."

"Look here," said Darbyshire. "Ten to one she'll get serious first, aint it? If she don't, it's only 'cause she doubts your little game. If she does, and you're not taking any—well, it's pretty rough on *her*. You feel mean. Now, if *you* get serious, thousand to one she'll have you whether or not. Girl may even fancy she's in love, and then can't live up to it—rough on both. Loaded dice, against the girl either way. Fairer you try to play, worse you make it. Q.E.D.!"

Darbyshire gave his demonstration like so much

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patter for a thimble-and-pea trick. Enoch, amused, asked him, "Why don't you talk to Barbara?"

"I'll write a book," said Darbyshire. "'The Old Game, and How to Play it: By a Steady Loser.' Feel pretty chirpy?"

"Oh, yes. I'm all right."

"Good. When I've scraped myself, we'll go to the park for church parade. I just have time to finish this pipe."

They sat awhile talking of things indifferent, and thinking still of Barbara West apart. Said Enoch on an impulse, "I think I shall go to some chapel to-night, old man. . . . I used to go every Sunday at home, you know. Not that I care much; but I haven't been to a chapel since I came to Merchanton."

"Say church, and I'm with you. Can't stand the talkee-talkee."

"Very well. You know the Prayer-Book, I suppose. I can never find the place."

"Put your trust in Dollinger, my boy. Oh, good! I shall mention it writing to the mater; please her awfully! I'm a good churchman, though only really pious since I fell in love myself!"

With that Darbyshire, about to go upstairs and dress, turned back to wind up the musical box, forgetting the day; and it buzzed off into a vulgar song of the time called "La-di-da." Mrs Metcalf is to be imagined concealing a dreadfully-delighted sense of his wrong-doing. He was showing off his treasure, the dear boy!

CHAPTER XIII

EDITORS AT PLAY

ONE may feel some concern for the pious father and mother at Sheepton losing touch with their lad. They prayed over Enoch Watson anxiously and daily; and his rare, indifferent letters tried their faith.

He, on his part, found no time to imagine this. Some thoughts of it did visit him, but the house was stormed continually by newer guests—fresh scenes, ideas, and people. The prayer was, that he might be kept in the narrow path. I do not know that he strayed far; but certain it is that he and they were not in single file. He was never seen in a Methodist chapel, he went to church but once in six eventful months, and, except as Paine and the sight of Paine provoked him, for a time he gave no thought even to the great riddle. Life was much too full of detail to be considered whole yet. No doubt the saving grace of common sense was all to find; and meanwhile it is marvellous how safe a decent lad will go when hard at work and healthy.

As a journalist, Enoch was fortunate. Ireton had not kept him with a view to strengthen the reporting staff, for whom, indeed, in a lull that followed the election, there were many idle days between occasional flurries, after the demoralising manner of their craft in those times. He was haled up to the sub-editors' room, and to the dignity of night work, under Penny.

All but Paine, his colleagues frankly envied him. Sowerbutts half resentfully called him a lucky young dog; and even Paine, to whom he had not spoken one

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dispensable word since their falling out, made this preferment an occasion for generosity

"Hello!" said he, meeting Enoch on the stair. "Here, don't go past; I want to congratulate you. How's this, you're going on to the editorial staff?"

A shade too much of emphasis betrayed his thought that Enoch would be flattered. So indeed he was, immensely; but he scarcely cared to show it, not supposing Paine to be equally pleased. "I don't know; I didn't ask for it," he said.

"Come," said the descriptive reporter, who meant well, "don't be a young cub. You're so shirty! Where's your *espre di core*? You mustn't think I'm jealous, y'know."

"I don't care what you are," was his plain ungracious answer. For to be reassured on such a point by a person one dislikes is trying.

"Well, but, look here," Paine persisted, and took hold of the lapel of his coat, "you're makin' a mistake, youngster. You can't bear malice if I don't. Where's your Christianity?"

"I never said I was a Christian," he said, and got away. Whereupon Paine laughed him down the staircase.

Nothing in the change so agreed with him as to be free of this ill-bred, smug tormentor, convicting him of bad behaviour. Dislike of Paine was grown by this time to a smothered passion. It had been kindled in good taste, no doubt; and so far, Paine was not to blame for it; but its intensity was due to Paine's frank way of teasing him like somebody much younger and less wise. It is evident that he ought to have bought a pea-shooter and kept Paine moving. For such badgering patronage of an older man there is no corrective between that kind of treatment and murder, which is excessive. Enoch,

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being serious but not homicidal, suffered helplessly ; and Paine, by showing him only one face of his character, had really come to seem abnormal, like an ogre in a story-book. How the other men could be friendly with him, how his own friend Darbyshire so much as tolerated him, Enoch did not understand.

To his astonishment Macdonald, too, expressed some gentle admiration of Paine's character. For one thing, Macdonald was a little puzzled by the effect he had made on an ingenuous mind. "Oh, yes," he said, "Mr Paine has odd opinions, very ; that's his misfortune. But he's what is called 'a fairly decent fellow at bottom,' and the best of us is no better than that."

Penny notwithstanding, sub-editing would not appear essentially to be a joyous occupation. Next to the weary man who must review more books than he can read, your average "sub" is the most anxious person in a newspaper office. Consider him from Heap's point of view. It is not simply that he enjoys no change of society, and every night walks home through silent streets to a silent house, and sleeps while the sun shines. It is not even that the ignorant, heedless world is ungrateful ; he expects nothing better. What you are to ponder is the demand upon his public spirit. Has he not to sit in judgment upon all that happens under the sun, and, whether it interests him or not, to appraise it cheerfully for people he neither knows, sees, nor cares about ?

Enoch was younger than Heap, and found this duty interesting.

True, there was always the printers' overseer, for ever a prophet of disaster in the place. He came every half hour, or less, to say, in various tones of mild apprehension, reproach, red-faced worry, abdication and bitter anger, that the paper could not get to press that night. His

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men were unable, he said, to set a paper all in the last half hour. Of course, if there was to be a blank page he washed his hands of it; but perhaps in that case he had better make a stereo-plate of the contents bill. This desperate man, beyond a doubt, addressed himself to Enoch frequently; and Enoch was alarmed. Penny, unruffled, resembled Mr Chamberlain in some later Irish debates, blandly smiling. In virtue of seniorship and the power of work within him, he sometimes took himself away for an hour to the theatre. It might be that he came back like three or four men; but meanwhile it lay upon his juniors to keep the horse-leech overseer supplied.

The new employ, then, although it did not cure him of sighing, was for Enoch a great diversion.

He saw Macdonald and Penny under a new aspect. When, at three o'clock of the fevered small hours, work was done, Heap went promptly home; and it seemed so natural a thing to do that Enoch might have followed suit. But it happened the first morning that he was in dire want of supper, and while he ate of the office store Macdonald drew aside his curtain. Grim in the doorway, he stood with his eyes upon Penny. There was a gleam of purpose in them. Penny nodded—without looking up—finished a letter, blotted it, whistled a stave of the toreador's song from *Carmen*, and was smitten briskly on the cheek with a boxing-glove. Another followed it like a flash, and overset a gum bottle. Now, when his gum is spilled, a sub-editor gets upon his feet.

"Macdonald of that ilk," said Penny, tearing off a sheet from his writing-pad to mop it up, "this morning I shall kill you." And Penny was six feet high.

The little Scotsman coughed, and retired without a word. In a state of glorious expectancy, Enoch heard

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him moving chairs about, and went to look. The room was large ; the gas had been extinguished ; and there being no more than a peep of dawn, these preparations looked a little gruesome.

"What's this?" cried Penny, following.

"I've put away the glass chimneys, laddie. Ye're a dangerous man when angered," said Macdonald.

"But why turn the gas out?"

"Garn!" said Macdonald; "who's afraid?" And they began to box in that dim light, where Enoch could not see their faces. At every rally, Macdonald's clamorous laugh was a gladsome thing to hear. It rang with the quality known as "devil." Enoch watched a fairly equal combat wear itself out in total exhaustion of the combatants.

Is there any such fun in the office of a daily morning paper nowadays? If any fun there be, one fails to hear of it. However, it was under the rose even then; there were reasons why it should not get wind. Breakages were one reason. Another was, that Penny had introduced an air-gun, which required the use of a bound file of the *Chronicle* for target. The file is doubtless to be seen somewhere at this day, identifiable by certain perforations which were absurdly laid to the account of a large kind of bookworm. There was also a round game of catching played by three persons with two waste-paper baskets; the idea of each man being to whisk the next man's head off. It wore the baskets out before their time.

The admirable thing for Enoch was to hear these hierophants fall to arguing great subjects between the bouts. A joke would start them, how he knew not; Penny in good earnest often, roundly asserting, ready to cite authorities; Macdonald picking all to pieces with a genial calm, or laughing heartily. What powerful

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slang they knew ! How light they made of the weightiest names and some accepted notions ! With what queer flatteries they agreed to differ, or, counterfeiting mutual derision, proceeded suddenly to common assault. These doings kept them from their beds for three hours every day and sometimes four ; and they may seem to have been dissolute. They were, in fact, subservient to the cause of temperance. Soon after six o'clock that first morning, the three sallied forth in clear cool sunshine to patronise the Central Coffee Tavern, a new institution admired from all points of view. There, in an atmosphere smelling of wet sawdust, they supped on cakes and fresh coffee, and said that virtue was its own reward. "This does it !" Penny would yawn, as he stretched himself on a bright red velvet couch and blinked at beaming urns. "The drink problem is now solved. Temperance becomes a luxury." And so, being all at length agreed, they fell under a pleasant exposition of sleep.

It was from Penny, one morning, that Enoch got his first notion of the kind of man Barbara West's father had been. Penny was telling of Emily Soldene, and said that he had once had supper with her at little West's.

"You knew little West, Macdonald ? Why, I thought that everybody knew little West. But you are a hermit. Anyhow, she picked him up in her arms, I tell you, and said he was her baby ; and little West got up a very life-like cry. He enjoyed it. I assure you it was screamingly funny—with his shiny bald head and spectacles, and his little boots kicking."

"This would be West of the subscription concerts ?" Macdonald said.

"That's the man."

"Ah, I never met him."

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"You were never behind the scenes at the Royal, then?"

"No, sir."

"West lived there—at least when there was opera on the bill, or nothing musical elsewhere. A sort of tame cat on the premises; the manageress rather liked him. He conveyed her little compliments to the ladies, and kept the critics well informed, in a diplomatic whisper that smelled of whisky and cigars. Fussy little beggar, he was. Oh, you should have known West. He had such nice fatherly ways, and the women made fun of him. It went rather far sometimes, poor devil. The Sisters Honeysuckle—their manners were not nice, as you may suppose—rushed him up to the footlights once, last night of the pantomime. But to see him rescue his spectacles! They'd fallen off, and the house twigged the situation in a moment. To see him pick 'em up and scuttle off again! Of course I vigorously goosed the Honeysuckle Sisters, and so did some other few judicious persons who liked him; nevertheless it was droll. Ah, well! little West was in his coffin within a week—*sic transit.*"

Penny ruminated.

"Yes, you've an eye for the cheerful side of things," Macdonald said. "One sees it in your daring head-lines." For Penny in those days was an innovator.

"Do you think so?" he said vivaciously. "Head-lines are much too dull as a rule; that certainly is my feeling. So easy to miss a *point*, you know."

Enoch ventured on a question. "Did Mr West—had he any family?"

"He left one little girl and one widow," Penny answered. "Why? Do you know them?"

"I think I know the little girl," blushed Enoch.

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"Plays the violin," said Penny. "Ah! plays very nicely, I believe."

"She plays wonderfully," Enoch said with enthusiasm.

"I shouldn't be surprised!" Penny had keen eyes. "He was very proud of her; made her play to all the professional people who came to his house. And sent her up to the Academy, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes; she was there three years."

Then Mr Penny, after a pause, said casually that West was really a useful little man in his own line. But for him, at one time the subscription concerts would have been dropped. "I think, Macdonald, we may call him properly 'a patron of the arts,'—

Tantò major famæ sitis est, quam
Virtutis.

—Ahem! Juvenal."

"Say that again," said the leader-writer; and Penny did so, in the manner of posing a riddle.

"Really," Macdonald observed, with his grimmest smile, "this erudition, at six o'clock in the morning, is *nobil*.—

Quis enim virtutem amplectitur ipsam,
Præmia si tollas?

—The humble Penny, gentlemen."

They both laughed noisily, and Enoch, who had no Latin, was concerned for the late Mr West.

"How's that, sir?" demanded Macdonald, rubbing his hands together briskly, "for a man who left school at eleven years of age? Had him on the hip, Mr Watson; on the hip! So no more furrin langwidges, Mister Penny."

CHAPTER XIV

BARBARA AND THE CUL-DE-JATTE

CHANCE and his situation, joining hands, put off for a month at least the next encounter of Enoch and Barbara. And by him it was left to chance.

He might have written to her; half a score of times he thought of doing so, or took up the pen to begin. An unaccountable reluctance checked his hand. He knew where to find her on certain afternoons, yet he went to bed no earlier those days than others, and slept, like his owlish colleagues, up to near the tea hour. True, there were days when he awoke forlorn, and looked upon the sunset grieving; laboriously sighed as he "slaughtered" local news all night long with a big blue pencil. But the mood was nugatory. Once it got him early out of bed at a week-end. He lingered in two minds until her train was gone, and then went home to Sheepton. Yet in passing through Dingley he saw the Bel Rock high aloof, and smarted. He was strangely cheerful after leaving it behind.

Great on that occasion was the hearty pride of Eli Watson in his lad's advancement. That of the mother's meeker love, though very visible, found no words to add to his. They sat with the home-comer well into the first hour of Sunday, to hear him talk of things wonderful in the production of a big newspaper. They smiled at his enthusiasm under an air of manliness, admired Macdonald with him, rejoiced in his contempt of Paine with more satisfaction than they let him see, and questioned rather doubtfully of Darbyshire. Eli Watson read Macdonald's grimly playful leaders with

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daily satisfaction ; he would like to shake that man by the hand, he said—for his own Liberalism was militant and knew no compromise. So they went to bed happy.

But, although he was left to sleep until dinner-time—excused the morning chapel—Sunday with its tedium of self-repression drove him back upon idle thoughts and moodiness.

The further questioning that he feared came in the intimacy of an afternoon walk with his father. What place of worship was he attending ? He answered that Darbyshire had taken him to church once—confronting the over-night's doubt of his lively friend while he made his own defence ;—but that of course he slept late, and, every other Sunday night, he worked. The answer was not adequate, and home for the time ceased thereupon to be homelike. His father's grave serenity after chapel in the evening—when Enoch, with nothing Sundayish to do or say, longed for the country bed-time simply—was touched with a kind intention almost oppressive, since it implied so much of a hope that Enoch knew to be overweening. He had to try for a little honesty over supper with small criticism of the preacher. A journalist might be allowed to do as much without offence, he imagined ; and, in fact, affectionate hearts approved his wisdom. Mr Watson was himself a formidable critic, even of doctrine. But Enoch had to avoid the doctrine altogether, and felt no better for his say. They saw him unsmiling and restless ; conversation ceased ; he fumed a while over *Paradise Lost* and lapsed into visible gloom.

He hoped they would not notice it ; his father was deep in *Barnes's Commentaries*, his mother in *The Christian World*. But certainly, he thought, he had failed to make them happy. And so to bed. Why—oh, why !—had he shunned so bright a being as Barbara ?

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Next week, Darbyshire led him out on a two days' tramp in the Yorkshire dales, an enterprise so ardently pursued, a change of scene so perfectly fresh and exhilarating, that for some days he was his own man again. He heard, too, that Paine, being half-tipsy one night, had girded much at Barbara. It was characteristic of Jack Darbyshire that he had listened to this, and when the tirade flagged at all had revived it with a little chaff. His opinion, reserved for Enoch's comfort, was that Paine had found her one too many for him; Paine must have seen "the little flash of Barbara's temper."

"Barbara's temper!" said Enoch.

"Oh, yes," laughed Darbyshire, "she has a temper; so has every girl who isn't a softie, dear boy—if you happen to touch it off." Which seemed a calumny.

But if he was able awhile to think of her with a lighter heart, Enoch began to be uneasy on the score of his mannerless and unexcused neglect. And at last, as he hurried down one evening to the office late, he met her.

Both he and she were walking in the roadway, for the "causer" on either side was swept by a stream of mill-hands, racketing home in clogs; and so each spied the other at some distance. But only Barbara—sincerely glad to see him—had her mind made up when they encountered. As for him, his first impulse was to escape the meeting, which might challenge him to an impossible exposition, of complex reasons and emotions. He had not at all considered how he should treat her; and, while Barbara came quickly on, Enoch grew hot with apprehension.

But after all it was quite easy! She held out her soft little gloved hand with a pleasant glance, and began to talk rapidly.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr Watson? Do you know,

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I've been wanting to see you. Really; I mean for a reason. Where have you been all the time?"

Enoch slipped a word in—"They've put me to night-work."

But she scarcely paused for his answer, though as he spoke she acknowledged it with a little movement of the head. That head was full of affairs, and her heart of a trouble to be smoothed away. "I had something to tell you"—here came the nod, and a momentary smile with it to say she was busy—"and to ask your opinion. I was leaving home, you know. . . . Of course it is a great convenience; I couldn't go on any longer, really, with mother so difficult; so I've taken rooms of my own—such a nice little place, in Villa Grove, near the park, and not at all expensive though the neighbourhood is good. It only costs me so much a week for rooms, and, of course, what I buy in for myself"—she glanced at the basket in her hand—"and I paid twenty-five shillings at home, you know. . . . Mother was vexed, of course; but don't you think I've done right? You see I *must* practise. Oh, and I had such a good notice for a concert at Rotherfield; I must show it you. When will you come to see me?"

He was to understand that there had been nothing out of the common between them. So, at least, he took her to mean, pouring out in disorder so many surprising things with an air of talking commonplace. How was he to guess that in the distraction of a dreadful rupture at home she had often thought of him, as one to whom she might have gone with more of the trouble partly told at Dingley? Of her mother's idiosyncrasy he knew nothing, or, at least, nothing intelligently. Had he understood it, Enoch would have been very quick to feel for Barbara at this moment; for Mrs West was an example of the mischief unwittingly done to narrow and hard natures

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by a literal evangelicalism. Against music that was not to be labelled "religious," she entertained with many Yorkshire parents of her time a prejudice, founded, like Tolstoy's strained indictment of the merely artistic, upon the consideration that it may dissuade some minds from a lofty flight and poise of thought. In her conception of a crude piety, as in his of a transcendental code of morals, we should be devout to the exclusion of all amenities in a lost world. Barbara had the lighter mind of her father. But, compared with him, she was much more strongly centred; and this firmness, precocious and very positive, stood her in stead against the positive mother from whom she had it. In the long contention which, becoming daily sore as her mother grew fanatical, stretched to the breaking point relations never close, there had been no question of yielding in Barbara's philosophy, but only of a *modus vivendi*. She had an almost fretful dread of extremes in conduct; and the rupture, which was forced upon her at last by a holocaust of music-sheets in the kitchen grate, distressed her as much for that cause as by its mere unkindness. Her one girl friend was in London; to write to her had been only to long for personal confabulation in the trouble; and among Barbara's many friends of the other sex Enoch Watson, the one most recently found, seemed to her the most sympathetic. Indeed, to none other could she have spoken.

Enoch Watson heard her without quick sympathy, such was his own emotion. He was conscious of a change in her, and it perplexed him so that he caught hardly more than the general sense of what she said. But he understood—gracious forgiveness—that he was still her very good friend, her confidant; and once more he had partly forgotten how pretty she was, and innocent of the wish to wound. The pure, unbought, bewildering

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ing joys of Dingley thrilled again small in his breast, a cry to the quickening blood. Unless she had ceased speaking, it is not to say when he would have found his wits.

The invitation to call upon her startled him; he flushed up; here, after all, was the dreaded challenge, and he dared not call his soul his own. "*Can I come?*" he asked. Nothing else would let itself be said.

"Of course you may, silly boy," said Barbara, cheerfully; and, after pausing in vain for a word of comfort, she ran on. "Let me see—I've to remember such a lot of things now. . . . Come to tea on Sunday, will you?"

"All right," was his boy's ungallant answer. To be downright about it allayed his fears, and promised wise behaviour. "What time shall I come?"

"Not later than four, please; because at a quarter past six I shall be taken away to church, and I want us to have a nice long chat. It is too bad of you to keep out of sight so. Good-bye till Sunday, then!—Oh, do look at that poor creature!"

A cripple, apparently born without legs, miserably shrunken too in face and body, was pushing out to cross the street. Strapped into a sort of little box, he swung upon his hands, a few inches at a time. Enoch, when he had looked, saw that Barbara's eyes were fixed upon the piteous figure with a child's ruefulness. Presently this *cul-de-jatte* was among the traffic.

"Somebody should help him across!" she cried, and hastened instantly to do so.

"I'll go," cried Enoch. But she stepped out so quickly that he was separated from her by a passing cab. Then they moved across on either side of the cripple, taking care to let him be seen by the drivers. Near to the gutter he stopped, clear of danger and

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probably fatigued ; and Barbara, after a little hesitation, bent towards him.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "I'm sure you ought not to do that alone."

The half-shaven being turned his head, set within the shoulders, and thrust out a pale tongue at her. A thin little laugh followed them as they turned back. Enoch saw her face greyed with consternation and the increment of physical repugnance, but she did not open her lips until they had come to the other side again.

"I shall speak to the police about him," said Enoch, ruthlessly.

"I think he didn't like to be pitied," she answered quickly. "No, you mustn't do that. What a dreadful eyesore ; I hope I sha'n't see him again !" She shook off the ugly feeling to speak a pleasant good-bye.

Enoch on his way to the office had to wonder how it was that he had been fighting shy of her.

CHAPTER XV

PAINE EXPOUNDS HIS PRINCIPLE

ONE night in the same week the editorial staff had a visitor at three a.m., the front door being open.

The rush of work was ended, the last proof had been looked at, Heap had "cleared out," and Enoch had made a pot of tea which poured the colour of coffee. Like as before the storm on Galilee, "all was calm and bright" with these snug anchores. Macdonald and he with their coats off, Penny stripped to the shirt like a cricketer, they sat in various attitudes of loose repose, of a well-earned ease without dignity, and sipped that powerful brew.

A halting and slipshod footstep sounded on the stairs. They listened, and Penny muttered something unbenevolent about a casual printer on tramp. But the visitor blundered through the swinging door into the corridor, and came along familiarly; and as Penny got upon his feet their own door was pushed wide open. Paine!—absurdly drunk, but not unrecognisable—Paine with a battered hat and glazing eyes stood looking at them.

"Well, toilers!" he said in a tone of surprising cheer.

Macdonald admired. "Behold the Sybarite," said he.

"Now, that's unkind," observed the late reporter, and advanced a swaying step or two. They saw him pull himself together, controlling a fine pink exultation. He inserted one thumb and then another in the arm-holes of a pink waistcoat, narrow chested; and, not to

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look too jovial, he shook his head at the tea-cups. "I come in here," he said distinctly, "to see that nothing's wrong with the paper, and you call me Sybarite. It's ungrateful, Macdonald."

"No, modest," said the leader-writer. "We haven't toiled, consequently you are not a Sybarite."

Paine laughed "Haw, haw!" Then he pulled one smiling end of his moustache and thought that out. "Is that a Scotch joke?" he asked. "I feel sure there's a joke."

Macdonald sipped his tea.

"I always think there are jokes in Macdonald's leaders," Paine went on agreeably. "He tries to conceal 'em, of course. . . . But why? Why so much modesty always?"

"Paine, you're drunk," said Penny. "Go home."

"Skittish, skittish," Macdonald substituted. "*In vino veritas*: this is flattering."

It was Macdonald's way to chop humour like bad logic; neither Paine nor anyone else could ruffle him; and while Enoch sat amazed at Paine's sheer impudence, the object of it smiled upon his critic most benignly. Paine sat down and pushed his hat back.

"Penny, you should never fo'get the power of example," he said. "You're in the presence of youth and innocence. You should try to cultivate good manners, my boy."

"I like that," said Penny. "Take your hat off."

"Very well," Paine assented cheerfully; "very well. Now apologise like a gentleman."

Penny snorted.

"Of course!" crowed Paine, and put on his hat again. "You aint a gentleman; you can't do it, you know!"

"What in thunder brings you here at this time of

Paine expounds His Principle

night?" said Penny. "Been turned out of some place?"

Paine looked round upon the others for support. "Now, is this a nice way of welcoming a colleague?" he asked. "But I shall tell Macdonald. I fled from temptation—in a pious moment. Besides, I thought of young Watson wanting an experienced person to take 'm 'ome to his virtuous couch. Young Watson," he explained, with a touch of seriousness, "young Watson's offended with me, but I forgive him. . . . How's the young lady, Watson? Now, don't look worried. He, he!"—laughing suddenly—"young Watson's a reg'lar fire-eater. Mos' cruel. He hit me on the mouth before you could say 'Hello.' Better be careful how you talk to him!"

Enoch was rather needlessly abashed. He had a glimpse of Macdonald's pale face, with a slight frown upon it, and of Paine opening a wide eye at himself.

"Never mind, I aint goin' to eat her," he continued. "I want young Watson to be friendly. He's not happy. Be happy, Watson, and tell us what you think. Don't sit an' brood."

"I agree with Mr Penny, if you want to know," said Enoch.

"No—no, you don't." In arch expostulation Paine's head wagged with the eyes shut. "What you think," he said slowly, cocking up the playful forefinger, "is that you don't like *chaff*. . . . That's the defect of pious education. Cultivate a sense of humour; what do you want to be so serious?"

"Oh, dry up, Paine," cried Penny, sharply. "*Your* sense of humour is too painfully lacking in taste. You're fulsome. Don't you see you're not wanted?"

Macdonald was intently taking snuff. Admire the various uses of this now unfashionable habit.

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Paine turned with a blithe disdain to him. "D'ye hear what narsty unkind things they're sayin'?" he asked.

"Ay," the Scotchman briefly answered, snuff in his throat. "I think they're trying to hurt your feelings; and that's a mistake."

"Haw, haw! I'm invulnerable," cried Paine, much pleased. "I make allowances for zeal, and youth, and silly ideas that warp their judgments. 'Course, they don't understand. They pass their little lives diligently, and think they're doin' somethin' necessary an' indispensable—"

"Which is a pleonasm," remarked Macdonald.

"Necessary and indispensable. And it isn't!"

"Neither is your talk," said Penny, "and yet it's too diligent by half. Do be off!"

But all such scorns were useless. "I will not be put down," Paine quoted joyously, "by vulgar clamour," and he got upon his feet. "I insist upon fair hearing, and I defy you t' interrupt the flow of my ideas. I'm pointing out that your work is of no importance, because you're not indispensable. If you die, or Macdonald dies, or I die myself—"

"Do," said Penny, heartily.

"All right. But you're in such a hurry," said Paine. "When we die, either separately or all together, the paper'll come out jus' the same as usual, an' there won't be a line of obituary notice for anyborry — 'cept Macdonald'. Macdonald might get about as much as a suicide. What—what's the Word say about it? The common or garden reporter withereth, the sub-editor fadeth, and the place thereof . . . know him no more."

The speaker gave way at this point to immoderate silent laughter.

It was unfortunate tactics on Macdonald's part, Paine

Paine expounds His Principle

being such a bore, to answer the fool according to his folly. "I'll haunt any chump who writes a line about me," he said. "The place will know *me* some more."

"No! You can't!" said Paine, with cheerful eagerness. "You're done; you're in the oven. You *must* believe what God wrote an' published about it. Penny and young Watson too, it's all up; you've done your diligent little microscopic best, but you've got to perish. Very well, then; why make such a fuss of yourselves? Why not improve the shinin' hour? Look at me."

"Rather not," said Penny, who by this time was toying with a lead weight. "I might improve the shining minute."

"*I'm* going to enjoy myself—if young Watson'll give me a chance. What you want is to think what you're doin', 'stead of goin' grubbin' along an' missin' all the fun. You want me to talk ph'losophy to you. . . . There's young Watson now, he suffers *pangs* of jealousy; I know he does, an' it's all because he thinks he's virtuous, and I aint. Now, let's be candid; we're men. Aint that what you think, now?"

"Oh," cried Penny, leaping to his feet, "I can't stand this. Take yourself off, you lout! Why don't you punch his head, Watson? Punch his head and chuck him down the stairs."

Enoch answered on a note of wistfulness not without humour. "I've done it once," he said.

"Well, if you can stand him out," jerked Penny, "all right. I'm sick." And he walked with his cup and saucer out into the next room.

Macdonald, too, got upon his feet.

"No, don't go," cried the unbidden guest in disappointment. "I'm goin' to make a confession. . . . Penny! No, damn it! Don't spoil the symposium; don't!"

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Macdonald laughed in pure appreciation of cross purposes. But something had to be done. "You see," he said to Paine drily, "it happens that most people don't care to hear an argument pointed so sharply with personalities. If you could contrive by any means to deal in general sophistry—"

"Well, all right," said Paine in his throatier voice. "That'll do. All right, come back, Penny. You're running away from the argument!"

"Give us your ideas about human effort. They're interesting!"

"Nev' mind Penny," he resumed. "He's prejudiced. He goes to church every Sunday. But that's *it*, y'know; these moral men are so hide-bound. If a man hasn't the pluck to do as he likes with himself, what," said Paine, with contemptuous indulgence, "can you expect? Always cringin' to these three 'Ebrew gods, cringin' to other people. Daren't take any real pleasure in life. Well, *naturally*, they don't like t' see anybody else doin' so." Paine waved his hand, dismissing the subject. He was just a little put out.

"I may say," observed Macdonald, however, and, spoke with much preciseness, "that I don't instantly recognise Mr Penny in this description, or Mr Watson; though it does hit rather hard at me. What I feel is," he explained, ignoring a demur, "that I haven't the pluck sometimes to do as I like when other people are concerned. My wife, for example, if you can excuse a domestic illustration. Somehow I can't go to bed in a morning till I've lit the fire for her, and cleaned my boots, and generally cringed around. I daresay I work rather harder down here than I need to do, as well."

Having chafed with Penny against so much tolerance, Enoch was agog now.

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Said Paine with sudden rancour, "Now you *are* getting personal, aint you?"

Macdonald, in the act of taking another pinch, paused and looked him in the eye, with a face of wood. "Well, no," said he, "I had not precisely meant to do so;" and snuffed with more than usual deliberation and relish. "It would lack modesty, of course. One may take one's own case as understanding it best."

"Ah," said Paine, bitterly, "you don't know what you're talkin' about. P'raps you'll find out f' yourself one day."

Macdonald's look softened. "You rather miss the sense of my confession," he said gently, even reflectively. "Take another case. I know that at times it would have given me pleasure, real pleasure, to kick certain people hard. I should find a lasting satisfaction in remembering that I had done it. People, I mean, that never did me any harm; only they seem to want kicking, just as a demonstration of the common humanity associating them and me." He laughed, and fell into his former mordant tone again. "I never do it. I know it wouldn't do them any good, and I *think* it would hurt. Seems to me I cringe that way—though you might find excuses for me, I daresay. . . . However, I just can't get it out of my head that there is a God looking after things like that. If so, of course He made these other people as well as me; and I persuade myself that if I kicked 'em I should be meddling clumsily in His affairs. I don't know if you follow that."

"Well?"

"That's all. That's where I feel that you and I are unlike. I've *never* been quite myself, I believe. . . . You were saying—? I beg your pardon; I'm afraid I've broken the thread of your discourse."

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"Never mind," said Paine; "there aint any God, an' I want to talk to young Watson."

"Of course," Macdonald explained, "if I were sure there was no God I could turn myself loose, and tell all my friends about it too." With that his imagination got to work, and he laughed out heartily. "By George," he said to Enoch, "what a fine large game of football it might be!"

Paine was again discovered to be softly cachinnating. "That's another Scotch joke," he said. "Macdonald always laughs at his own. But I'm going to give young Watson some advice—becos I never take advice myself."

"I don't," said Enoch, bluntly.

"Well, you can think of it when you're an old man. 'Ah,' you can say, 'I see old Paine was right. I wouldn't listen to him, but he knew what he was talkin' about. He knew.' You'll never be young again, young Watson. It's your only chance, an' you aint as wise as you will be."

Whereupon Penny cried from the other room to ask, very sensibly, how long they were going to listen to that God-forsaken imbecile.

Paine had some thought of replying, but discarded it. "This is the great secret," he said, prodding the air with his finger. "This is where the confession comes in, becous I made a mistake in *my* life; I'm goin' to tell you. Don't you be taken in by the first woman that behaves nicely when you talk to her. They're all alike. They all pretend to be as good as gold an' as mild as milk, angels ever bright an' fair. What you laughin' at?" This to Macdonald, whom the *ridiculus* mus of wisdom had diverted.

"I beg your pardon," said he. "It was not at you, I assure you. A thought."

Paine expounds His Principle

Paine's odd eyebrow lifted. "Because *you* don't know anythin' about women," he said. "*You* 'aven't—"

But of the amazing boast which Paine implied with numerical precision and an airy "Come, now," let it suffice to say that he acknowledged the curses of ten mothers.

There fell a silence in the room. Upon Enoch it had the effect of that suspense of movement under awakening expectation which belongs to the coming on of nightmare. He saw the room larger than it was, and seemed to listen for a long time to the ticking of his watch. A little stir that Penny made behind the curtain roused him. Macdonald was reaching up with preternatural indifference to a shelf of blue-books, as if he were still at work on a leader. Paine asked some question, blandly. Ought not the heavens to fall?

"Awa' oot o' this!" cried Macdonald, in the same moment, roaring dialect at him. "Ye're an unclean disease. Awa' to the scavengers!" He held a bulky blue-book, ready to hurl it.

"What's the matter, what's the matter?" asked Paine, demurring.

The missile struck him on the breast, and his hat fell off. Before he could rise from the chair a second book glanced off the side of his head; and the third bowled him over as he stooped. With extraordinary rapidity and an unfailing steady aim, the little man Macdonald beat him out of the room, and, grabbing an armful more of ammunition, pursued him into the corridor like a quick dog. Penny and Enoch jostled each other, pressing out to see the rest of it, and heard a sheet of glass go, and Paine laughing as he squattered down the stair. Near the foot a thrown mat swept his legs from under him in a cloud of dust; and when they had watched him bundle out through the swinging doors

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and returned to the room, behold, Macdonald had a window open, speeding him down the empty street with chunks of coal at his heels.

He drew in presently and shut down the sash, not more pale and grim than usual. There was even the accustomed twinkle in his eyes, and he began at once to pick the blue-books up.

"I think," he said, "that may discourage him—for the time being ; for the time being."

CHAPTER XVI

DISCUSSION OF A SHOCKING EXAMPLE

ENOCH had rarely been so happy in his life, or so grateful to any man as he was to Macdonald.

Helping to collect the blue-books, he laughed still. Macdonald had been thorough, and yet appeared doubtful that he ought to join in the laugh; pleased with himself, but a little dubious of propriety in battle, murder and sudden death. His nervous satisfaction and the surprising mastery of that unexpected onslaught kept Enoch laughing until he was weak, and he leaned against the staircase rail and dropped the gathered blue-books. Paine had hurried like a duck with a little dog at his tail. Going down the stair, his legs and arms had the look of disordered wings; and he was heavy, and seemed as if he thought of sitting down somewhere. He kept up a quacking outcry. It began in bibulous laughter at Macdonald's anger, passed along the corridor in Parthian expostulation, and acquired a fine full note of cackle on the stair. From the street no sound came up but the patter of small coal. Paine was well under way then. He soared. They saw him on the wing though Macdonald had ceased to expedite him; and he flew approximately straight.

The deliberate thinker and reasoner betrayed into action by his good instincts is, however, conscious of an inconsistency. Macdonald was uneasy. Resenting it, he compared himself to Joey the Clown self-conscious. In the room he found Penny thinking hard—or with the look of a man who is doing so—and this assured

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him of Penny's approval. He began to make a casual apology while putting up the books:

"My theory of *laissez faire*," he said, "breaks down at times. You will observe that I was bound to lend a hand to the Ruler of the Universe. Not that it does any good—except to the organism called Macdonald. Personally," he said, upon sitting down again, "I feel distinctly refreshed; quite agreeably pharisaical."

Penny startled him by crying, "Oh, for heaven's sake don't jest about it in that cold-blooded way." As he spoke the chief sub. threw himself back and struck the desk. "Your indulgence, my dear Mac, is too miscellaneous. How you endure such a Caliban I can't make out."

The little Scot shook out, in Meredith's phrase, a coil of laughter. "I don't endure him!" he said. "I am—eh—under the impression that he went away because I couldn't."

"Oh, yes!" Speaking with much bitterness, Penny took his head between his hands and leaned upon his elbows. "*That* doesn't meet the case, good Lord!" he groaned. "Why, he's incredible!" and up he sat again. "He's an infamy, a smiling poisoner, a sort of fetid human vermin. He's a fault in Nature. Oh, I believe in Lynch law!"

"Yes," Macdonald quietly conceded, "he's all that, I daresay."

As for Enoch, Penny's indignation sobered him. He heard his own feelings voiced. And Macdonald reviewed his own position for defence while he took more snuff in little pinches, seeing that Penny was much upset. Having done so, he seemed prepared for argument; and, but that his square knobby forehead and bristling hair were formidable, he had the placid poise of a school dame looking through spectacles.

Discussion of a Shocking Example

Penny had to unburthen his soul of its natural repugnance for a scoundrel. He asked: "What's the use of civilisation while that man walks about like a swollen bug? Breeding more of him! He makes a coward of every man that leaves him alone. Why, even if the law overtook him, what of that? A mockery, a piffling, incompetent makeshift; the law prevents nothing. Good God!"

"Yes," Macdonald said, in the same quiet tone, "I guess it's the sort of thing that doesn't happen among all barbarous peoples—if he wasn't simply bragging. Among certain races not intellectual, he'd have been knocked on the head with a club some time ago."

"But what's to be done? You can't do that, of course. It's carefully provided against. That's supposed to be a major offence."

"You can do it," said Macdonald, "if you care enough." And as Penny started impatiently he added, "I admit that unless you are content to be hanged you can do nothing. At least by way of retribution. You're imploring retribution, and the fact is, I think, that Paine's case is hopeless, unless for a shocking example;—*as which*, it appears to be somewhat better worth printing in this morning's paper than anything that has come over the wires."

"And why don't we print it?" cried Penny, with desperate zeal. "It ought to be set up in bill type, across the leader page:—'We beg to warn our readers against the manners of Mr Frederick Paine, a member of our staff, who has debauched ten innocent girls and is not amenable to English law.' Why don't we?"

"Libel," said Macdonald, "criminal libel for one thing. Besides, it wouldn't do the least kind of commensurate good."

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"You recommend something funny, I suppose—a little game with blue-books and a door mat."

Then Macdonald undertook to talk a little plain sense. He brought one shoulder forward to lean an elbow on his crossed legs, and his articulation of words was distinct.

"What you have got to do," he ground out, "is to show the unreflecting British public how the indifference of most of 'em to this matter of sexual morals, and the prudery of others, which combine to exclude it from every educational scheme as a matter shameful in itself—what you've got to make 'em see is, that prudery and indifference are equally an absolute mischief, a mistake. Paine's record—Paine himself, for that matter—is just a ghastly proof of it. If you want to know what's to be done, start a magazine or something, and work out the connection between cause and effect. Teach the British public that the sexual instinct is part of the Divine order, and not original sinfulness, any way. That's the point to be made. They've got to *revere* the sexual instinct, sir; they've got to understand the fact that all honourable behaviour with respect to it is ennobling; they've got to feel proud of it, and bring up the new generation to think of its satisfaction as a pretty sacred business."

Penny lay back in his chair and folded his hands. "Yes, I know your theory of that," he said gloomily. "That's all right, I daresay. But Paine: stick to Paine. You don't mean to say that that sort of teaching would have influenced Paine. He doesn't believe in a Divine order, or anything else."

The quiet answer turned away controversial wrath.

"You may do what you like with Paine," Macdonald said. "I say I don't believe he would stand so much of a chance. Paine is rather an exceptional sort of person."

Discussion of a Shocking Example

"Sir," said Penny, "Paine is an incarnate devil and should be smothered."

Whereupon they all contrived to laugh, and that cleared the air a little.

"Paine's amazing calmth," Macdonald mused, "is just a total lack of sensibility. He's like the people one sometimes meets, without an ear at all for music, only he doesn't know it. And that's the staggering circumstance. When a man is defective that way the defect itself prevents him from suspecting it. It's a perfect limitation of consciousness. . . . I'm bound to say he startled me."

"Come, Macdonald," Penny presently cried. "You don't believe in Hell or the Devil. How do you *account* for Paine? And what's his punishment?"

The philosopher awoke from his reverie. "Ah," he said, "I think not. It's as well to go to bed between the days, after all. . . . Some other time, sir. But I'll just have you one game of pitching coppers into a hat."

"Done," said the chief sub-editor.

CHAPTER XVII

PLAYING WITH FIRE

ENOCH WATSON looked forward to the Sunday visit to Barbara with a pure expectancy which mounted in him joyfully. He had no thought with it that he should one day persuade her to marry him. He was content to think of her as a gracious and delightful girl who liked him. In the secret heart of him there lived indeed a more romantic hope. Though Barbara would not marry him, she might still, in a way, prefer him to others, admitting him a closer friend than they—a sort of “mate” in the honest dialect sense.

Macdonald, knowing his temperament and how serious the bent of his mind was, would have told Enoch Watson that this kind of thing is called platonic love, and that he had better just act for sundry years to come as if platonic love were impossible; and Macdonald would have been surprised as little as any man to find him paying no heed to that advice.

“That young man Watson,” he had said to his wife after the first talk with him, “is born to suffer, as the sparks are to fly upward. I hope it’ll do him good.”

Villa Grove, the little street that Barbara lodged in, was a *cul-de-sac*, with an aisle of tall poplars close against the houses, and box-tree hedges round the garden-plots. The poplars rustled brightly, there was a Sunday quiet in the air, and Enoch, in some trepidation of heart, was daunted by a prevalent look of trim respectability. He wondered if the wan unsmiling landlady of No. 13, who came to the door herself with

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the manner of a pew-opener, thought his visit quite regular. She showed him into an equally wan room, with white antimacassars on the well-regulated chairs, green paper in the fireplace, and some appalling family portraits in oil. This was all so very unlike Barbara that he supposed he had come to the wrong house. The woman had a deaf look ; she must have misunderstood him.

Presently someone tripped down the stairs into the passage, and he heard Barbara's pleasant voice : " Oh ! why didn't you show him into my room ? " She entered, coming quickly forward to give him her hand—smiling, but with a momentary look of deprecation. He lost his head immediately, as usual. Pretty as a picture and freshly toileted, she brought a faint, cool odour of perfume ; and the softness of her small palm in his was exquisite. " I'm so glad you're early," she said—Had he mistaken the time ?—" Come along ; " and in a shocked whisper, "*Isn't this a perfect chamber of horrors ? There's a fire in my room, all cosy.*"

He followed her without a word of common courtesy. His emotion was above all that, but so was her comradeship of greeting.

She wore a blouse of muslin, and her dark hair in a new fashion drawn up from the firm white neck. The unconscious poise of her head looked proud. They entered a bright little room, with the table set daintily. Barbara closed the door behind him, and when he turned about was close at his elbow, looking very sweetly good-tempered with her hands folded.

" Oh, this is comfortable," said he.

" Do you like it ? " she said, pleased. " I had such a hunt to find a place with a decent piano ! Of course those are all my photographs"—the mantelpiece and a little sideboard were covered with them—" and every-

Barbara West

thing had to be rearranged; and the plants are mine, and I must get some more little nicknacks and things to stick about. But oh! if you'd seen it when I came—the things I had to turn out! I don't think the poor woman liked it—of course she doesn't understand—but I really couldn't have stopped, and she is very willing and teachable. I pay her ten shillings a week. Don't you think that very reasonable? I mean, to include everything but board. Sometimes I have to get a meal in town, of course; but all my washing! . . . And of course I shall be able to give her tickets now and then."

All this came out in one run, and with an air of great satisfaction, while he watched the play of her childish lips and questioning pleasant eyes. She pushed him gently, her hand between his shoulders, towards a chair by the fire, and drew it round for him.

"I want you to be very comfy," she said caressingly, "because this is my new *home*. . . . There!"

Considering his odd behaviour at their last meeting, and, prior to that, his unexplained neglect of her, Barbara had resolved that he might need some coaxing not to run away from friendship. She classed him with two old sweethearts who had been equally earnest. She liked him better than both because of his greater gentleness, and it might be possible to make amends for not being herself so earnest by lavishing kindnesses of light import. He was to reap where he had sowed, one may say. Sure she might be very free with him, and grateful for this confidence, Barbara took it as sure in the same degree that he would feel such favours as she meant them. They were to teach him not to feel too deeply. That every small caress of hand or voice or manner, every delicacy of tact, should only tell him what he stood to forfeit in accepting that sort of

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charity, she would have thought irrational had she known it; and on such a consequence she did not speculate. No woman who likes but does not love admits this consequence quite readily. But avoid such charity if you are a lover. Sooner than receive much of it, wish to be banned the dear presence with cruelty; or, if you stay, prefer to be her laughing-stock.

Barbara went upon her knees, and, pulling a cushion down from another chair, settled herself against the "fire-case."

He had not seen that easy pose till now, but he managed not to show surprise at it. He was feeling absurdly happy. He ardently desired that she should do and say everything and anything that occurred to her. She prattled on. "The worst is those folding doors to the other room—there behind the piano. If you feel a draught, come over to this side. I think I shall get her to give me that room for a bedroom, and then I can move the piano and lock the other door from the passage. It would make me so much more stylish, you know. Don't you think it would be nicer?"

He assented without any clear idea on the subject, except that this kind of management was perfectly Napoleonic. In his own lodgings he submitted to everything.

"Do sit here," she said, laying her hand on the chair by her side. "I was forgetting the draughts. It is stupid to run any risks."

So he moved over and sat with his back to the window, where, as she talked, he had her face and throat rosily outlined by the firelight under an aureole that gleamed in her hair. When she slightly changed her position, the better to look up at him, through one diaphanous sleeve he could even see the round arm glisten.

She saw him glance at the violin-case on a music

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cabinet. "I've got eight pupils," she told him, "two of them very good ones, besides those I go to see ; that makes thirteen altogether, and of course I'm very glad of them between the concert seasons. Next year," she said, dropping her eyes with a little smile of grave content, "I hope to get more *engagements*. I really ought to do well," looking up again, "because I can practise now. I practise quite four hours a day, and I shall do more in the winter. Oh, I couldn't have gone on at all as it was ; practice is everything, everything. Besides—well, it was very unpleasant."

He hardly hoped that she would tell him in what way it had been unpleasant, yet in the pause she made he listened with a sudden anxiety of interest.

"I sha'n't go to see them," she said, looking steadily down at the fire, "till mother has apologised. She said an awfully cruel thing to me—to Betsy, that is, when I was bidding her good-bye. Betsy has been with us, oh, ever since I was a wee toddler and used to run downstairs in my nighty to be dressed. I shall never tell what she said, to anyone."

He pitied her helplessly. After a little silence he murmured, "I'm very sorry."

She put up her hand on the arm of his chair without turning her head, and he presently ventured to let his own hand close upon the delicate fingers. It was as if she had wished to be assured of his sympathy so.

"You don't think I did wrong?" she asked cheerfully. "I put it off as long as I could ; and I wouldn't quarrel about it. I'm glad I didn't answer her in any way, because I needn't let myself think about it, need I? I know she will be sorry one day, and want to make it up."

The prediction had such a sorrowful sound, however, that Enoch said, "Oh, she is sure to be."

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But thereupon Barbara drew her hand away, saying, "Here comes Mrs Shuttlewell with the tea!" and he, ridiculously confused, darted over to the other chair as the door handle clicked. Barbara was unmoved, and rose with a pleasant face to see that all was as she wished it on the table. There were hot crumpets, and cold lamb, and a lobster mayonnaise, and the first mustard and cress of the year, and two jams, and a dainty show of confectionery. Over all these good things she presided with manifest pride, playing the mistress of an establishment.

Her way of doing so was graced, as if to conceal it, with a great pretence of appetite. This was diverting, as when, in the midst of conversation, she put on a best behaviour look and said very seriously, "I *finck* I shall eat a lickle piece more cumpit;" or, leaning on her elbow, held out a plate and begged, "Div me a lobster now," meaning some of the mayonnaise; or asked him, "Can oo dink any more tea?" When he agreed that this or that was good, she held up her chin and patted her hands together, doing something of the same kind absurdly with her feet.

"Are you paying me out for Dingley?" he asked.

"Mustn't *talk* about Dingley!" said Barbara, as if it were naughty; and when he had laughed he saw her blushing slightly. So he blushed too.

They talked about the extraordinary way in which they had made friends with one another right off. Wasn't it funny? It felt now as if they had been friends for years, Barbara said; and it was very wrong of him not to come near her for a whole monf; she thought he was a sulky.

"But you have so many friends," said Enoch.

"Haven't," went on Barbara, wagging her head.
"Only two or free real nice ones altogether."

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"There's Mr Armitage."

Barbara shook her head again, simpering. "He's a stupid," she explained.

"And that. . . conductor."

She pouted, reflecting; the simpler played hide-and-seek about her rosy mouth. "M—yes."

"Who besides?" This was very bold, but he had to say it.

"Oh—nobody really."

With that he had one coquetting flash of her eyes. How much did her eyes say?

"Do you mean that?" he asked; and his voice shook, try as he would to show no sign of eagerness.

"But you must be a good boy and do as I tell you," said Barbara, mistrusting too.

"Don't I?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, but—I shall be ever so nice if you do," said she, very serious. "Boys always want to be sweet-hearts, you know," she pleaded. "It's so silly, really, when I tell them I'm not ever going to have a sweet-heart; and I like boys; girls are so—stupid; all but one or two."

He forced himself to keep a cheerful face, but he could hardly swallow the next bite of bread-and-butter.

"And you're not to run away again and leave me to be—to myself, you know," she said, laying down her conditions mincingly; "because I like to be *fussed*." She held her head on one side, and her fork stuck up-right. "You're to pay me nice ickle attentions and not get coss."

"Dear, I *must* love you," he cried, trembling; "but if you wish it I will never tell you so. I know I am not fit to love you. I—"

"You can tell me," said she, with a gracious self-possession, "sometimes—when I want to be petted. See?

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But you must tell me very softly, and not be *wude*. . . . Pass me some pretty cakes now." And pursing her lips she made a show of whimsical hesitation, asking him which one to take.

Again disappointment and hurt! He could not laugh; she made too light of his devotion as before, and in such a way as to claim it. He watched her delicately bite the sweetmeat and munch voluptuously, letting her eyelids droop; and he was jealous even of that. But she looked sideways, and rested her glance upon him under the lashes. "Nice," she said, ready to bite again. "Have one. Bofe have one togever."

I imagine Macdonald looking somewhat grave at all this. Clearly it would not do, sir; it would never do in this world, Mr Watson.

But by such little tricks of coquetry, because she liked him and liked his worshipping eyes upon her, Barbara tamed her new admirer. She was for holding Love at arm's length, with intent to put a chain upon him; and her trouble in life was that in the end Love would never keep a proper distance. He either beset her far too hard, or snapped the chain and went. But Love, as he came in the guise of Enoch Watson, an honest boy and rather a quiet and clumsy one, Barbara really hoped to manage. She had rarely felt so happy. It took her back to the early days of her teens when Cousin Jack, of five or six big boys the only cousin who never kissed her but when she would, made longing eyes all day.

She began to talk about these cousins *à propos de bottles*, and to tell him what a little madam she was among them. They were really very fond of her, especially dear Cousin Jack. Poor old Jack! He bothered Uncle Bob to let him go to sea, and only last year they got news that he had been eaten by a horrible shark in Ceylon; and he looked so handsome and fear-

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less in his middy's uniform ; Barbara's eyes showed soft and moist while she talked. The others were all older than Jack ; Tom and Arthur used to take her on their knees ; they were quite big men, of course, with moustaches and nasty rough chins—civil engineers ; but Jack was, oh ! so comically jealous. Barbara did not think there ought to be such things as sharks.

Enoch spoke up for the unhappy sailor-boy, declaring that it must have been all those cousins who spoiled her.

"Don't care," said Barbara, with satisfaction, "because I like to be spoiled. I didn't have any brovers !"

She pushed her plate away, eyeing ruefully the good things left on the table. "Please touch the bell for me," she said, when they had sat some time after eating ; and she rose with a little sigh. He saw her glancing at the timepiece and looking sorry. But in the same moment her innate cheerfulness moved her to begin showing him the portraits and telling him who the people were. He listened eagerly, not to names or other practical details, but to the inflections of her voice, wishing to know how she felt towards this or that person. In taking up one photograph or another she sometimes touched him, or they bent their heads together. These accidents did not happen so heedlessly that Mrs Shuttlewell could see them ; Barbara seemed unaware of them, and smiled upon him naturally when he asked if there were no more photographs. By this they were alone again.

"That's all," she answered. "Which do you like best ?"

"None of them but yours." He shot her a roguish glance and instantly turned away, going to kneel and set her cushion afresh. The speech having cost him an effort, he was ashamed of it.

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"Oh, that's quite nice," she said composedly. He had already satisfied her as to which of her own half-dozen likenesses he thought "successful." "But I meant of the others, you know."

"I've forgotten them," he alleged.

Barbara blinked. "Then you've no business to. All my friends!" And she took him firmly by the elbow, turned him to the mantelpiece, and kept her hold while putting a card before him—the portrait of a young gentleman.

To no purpose. Instead of looking at it, he watched her face in the mirror, caught by the reflection of firelight on her throat and full smooth chin, and about the dimpling mouth.

"Don't you think *he's* nice?"

She looked up to read his face, darted a glance full of mischief at the mirror, and dropped her eyes. Also she put back the photograph and said, "I sha'n't tell you anyfin about him."

"He's a sweetheart, then?" said Enoch.

"M—he's very fond of me."

He considered the picture with a smile, as if to humour her. Inwardly he was, of course, disquieted by that teasing answer; and a touch of irritation, possibly of wounded vanity, was added to his mood by the face of this portrait. It was that of a man of thirty, who triumphantly stared past him out of the polished paper. With a brow low and narrow, a long nose over waxed moustaches, small eyes, and a puffy droop of the cheeks to a heavy jaw, this face was regular but dull and commonplace; nothing but jealousy could have caused Enoch to look at it twice; but he resented the stare, and the trim way in which the fellow's hair was brushed, and a large ring that he wore upon the necktie.

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Barbara had seated herself in the big armchair, and lay back watching him. "Why did you smile?" she asked.

"Did I?" said he, and set the photograph down, turning his back upon it.

"He is good-looking, though he knows it. That doesn't do him justice, because he has such colour, and is so big," she went on. "Well?"

"Am I to tell you what I think?"

Enoch forgot she had said that he himself was her one real friend.

"Yes, tell me."

"You won't be offended?"

She shook her head.

"I think he must be a cad. Why does he part his hair in the middle?"

"No, I shouldn't call him a cad," said Barbara, sitting up with a reflective glance turned upon the fire. "Oh, no, there you are mistaken. He's a little showy and fast, I daresay," emphasizing the supposed distinction; "but then his people are well-to-do. His father is Mr Tom Varley, the head partner of Kaunser Brothers—I think they're wool merchants, or something."

Enoch had never thought out a cad's attributes, though he used the word in its right sense. He could only be amazed to hear Barbara excuse what was showy and fast so charitably. And why did she speak of this cad? Why select him out of a large acquaintance for serious discussion? She talked on, defending her opinion, while Enoch felt the sweetness of this intimate hour turn to gall.

"But of course I don't care for him," she ended. "He's rather a bother, really." The pale face of her new and nicer friend had touched her pity; and, with an impulse of tenderness, "Never mind the stupid

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photos, silly boy," she said. "Kneel down . . . here beside me."

He understood that he was to pose himself as he had seen her do. Blushing with pleasure he went down clumsily while she put a cushion against the chair arm for his shoulder. Barbara saw him still grave beneath the blush. She said, "Now we're good friends; tell me what you can see in the fire," and she laid a hand lightly on his head an instant.

Such a caress was infinitely sweet in the moment of surprise, but he found himself under a cruel tension, knowing the delight of it to be meaningless. While she talked, Barbara altered the way of his hair. After all, Barbara West and the creature who had torn his heart with coarse infidelities at Sheepton were day and night for difference. This friendship, very candid, and coming to him quite unsought, healed indeed the wounds of that betrayal. How should he divine that in accepting it—unconditioned, it is true, but harmless in the conventional sense—he gave himself to finer tortures?

Barbara said good-bye when leaving him to dress for church. Her companion was to be Mrs Shuttlewell.

"I thought she would like it, you know," said Barbara. "She is so sincere and kind, that I believe I love her; and, poor woman, she has been very unfortunate."

Enoch was sure of one thing—that he had found for his dearest friend not a girl like any other, but an angel.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME PAINS AND PENALTIES

IN the open air, unpurposed, Enoch Watson made his way townwards, about his heart an incredible honey-sweetness. It was his "Sunday off"; he had nothing to do but abide his happiness; and it prospered quietly within him.

Why was he walking? He came to a stand, craving an unfrequented place in which to nurse the thought of Barbara. The stream of Sunday loungers, young people in fours abreast, strings of smaller lads or girls, occasional men of the working class, smoking, pushed by him with a vague sound of voices. He roused himself to get upon a 'bus going back into the suburbs, and left it when he found the horses turned about and the conductor saying "Terminus, sir." He ascertained the time of the last journey into town, and understood that he had four hours to be happy in.

He was upon the edge of open country, the air and sky marvellously clear as the sun fell. A little chill of regret for the pleasure surrendered touched him, changing his mood. Then he summoned his spirit to look as at other times upon the fresh beauty of a wide landscape, admiring the definiteness of tiny distant objects and the long shadows on a neighbouring hillside. It was very pleasant and cool to the fancy; but the stillness of it presently troubled him. He longed unsatisfied.

The mood passed as soon as he gave an ear to the abundant piping of birds and perceived the air about him warm and odorous.

Some Pains and Penalties

There was a young wood of birch and copper beech that glowed like a luminous veil betwixt the sun and his eyes. He turned down a steep lane into the heart of it, feeling again the former happiness although his mind was lucid. He was thinking of Barbara's humour; and he laughed softly, with bright eyes, because that playfulness was too naïve to hide her liking from him. The tokens of her liking—that vivid flash across the table from eyes that were demure, her pretty confidences, the overwhelming favours she had bestowed so lightly, her wariness even—went through his mind flitting, like merry faces seen by instants in a dance.

In the wood he lay down among shoots of bracken on a bank, looking up through the tree-tops. There was a singing bird behind his head somewhere, and one that answered it with a full throat out of the aisles and galleries of the wood. Enoch breathed the earthy and moist air, listening, and fell upon a reverie. He was imagining Barbara seated by him. She would sit so that he saw her face in something less than profile, just the coral ear and the apple-rounded cheek, and talk wisely about her affairs, and consult his eyes now and then with a drooping glance out of the little hollowed corner of hers. If he dared but touch the cheek with his lips!

The reverie quickened, so that the answering throble dragged its song with a weeping note. Would she be so angry? If he did kiss her, oh, she must know—she must know that he meant it fairly. He might have done it when he said good-bye! For she had seemed to smile as the time came; did a tell-tale flickering glance at last invite him? He was half sure: the image of this latent smile of hers, an almost imperceptible ripple upon ruby lips (her eyelids veiled the roguish meaning) was so persuasive. Was it indeed a smile, or the kiss itself, that trembled there?

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The remorse of a lost occasion bit dismally. He endured it, however, until he perceived, with a sudden ache of the wound, that all content was gone. Conscience then had somewhat more to cope with.

For common sense took sides with passion, instructing him once again to resent being played with. It is true that neither common sense nor conscience could fight in good order—could even fight at all intelligibly—with passion in the field. He did not rise to the height of "All or nothing ; my wife, or not mine at all." His argument was that he suffered because she would not trust him ; therefore, simply, she was heartless, and he had been too kind. It was honourable to treat her gently ; but he felt so proud of having done this, that now he chafed against the pains of self-denial ! Proud, and sure of his honesty in time to come ; but had she not taken his mastery of self, his noble quietness in every sorry transport, as a simple matter of course—pleasantly presumed upon it ? Pity at length for his hopeless case "was like a penknife in his heart," and so he turned upon his face in the bracken.

Self-pity is a too delicious woe. It abandons all preposterously to the original sweet despair of childhood that hugs a wrong without appeal. Our hero thought no more of his virtue. He was the voluptuous martyr simply, Barbara the executioner though he loved her.

In time the child within him was appeased and slept. He felt the cool air good about him. There was, indeed, a surprising cheerfulness in the first thing he saw upon coming back to consciousness of external nature ; a robin advanced quite near to him, with a schoolmasterly look of interest in his vagabondage. Not to scare the little chap, he lay still ; he had felt precisely such content in inertness once before, after a certain illness ; he lay and gazed into the sky of a silvery cloudless evening.

Some Pains and Penalties

Presently, in an accidental silence of the birds, he was aware that the light had waned, and he got upon his feet. There was a fire of level sunset, burning low behind the thicket. He admired, and went on his way still watching it. When the thought of Barbara again came visiting, he felt neither resentment nor special pleasure, but entertained it half indifferent, half smiling. He believed that if he chose to do so it would cost him nothing to keep away from Barbara West for a second month. She had made it certain that he would not choose, however.

So calm was he, so happily infatuated, that he despised the honest couples coming out of town who walked with fingers interlaced or waists encircled. The least exaggeration, and virtue is pharisaical. But indeed I suppose he had a right to as much satisfaction as ever he could distil, in the situation in which it had pleased the little blind god to place him.

Half an hour later the wrong fumes were coming off. For as he neared the end of Barbara's grove, which he must pass upon the way to town (he had preferred to walk in returning), Enoch was struck very cold by the sight of herself in charge of some cavalier. They were turning into the grove, and he satisfied himself that both, not one, went into the house No. 13. The cavalier was a big fellow with sloping shoulders, attired with unnecessary self-respect.

This incident led to their first contention. He called after forty-eight hours of shy anxiety—acutely painful when he had time to indulge it—and after two nights of unrestful sleep. Diffidence was not able to restrain him from venturing uninvited, possibly when she had some pupil with her. He arrived, however, in a most unwarlike trepidation, was charmed at the door by the sound of her violin, and forgot every grudge and mean

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misgiving instantly upon seeing the unaffected pleasure and surprise of his reception. He also begged her not to cease playing, and she readily resumed it, assuring him that practice did her more good when there was someone to listen ; so that they did not begin to "differ" until he had worshipped her a precious hour. By chance his eyes then lighted on a stylish walking-stick leaning by the fireplace.

"Whose is this ?" he asked when she ended. He was smiling, but he feared the question assumed a right of some kind to know.

"The stick ?" said Barbara, who had seen him take it up. "I'm sure I don't know. . . . Shall I go on ?"

"You might rest a while," said he, "and talk—if you don't mind."

Flushed with playing, she glanced at the clock, and then with a sigh laid down her fiddle and bow upon the table, strewn already with sheets of music.

"I've done four hours to-day," she said, underlining the two important words ; "two hours and a half before dinner. I shall do six, perhaps eight. Some days I can play and never get tired. But yesterday"—she pursed her lips and opened her eyes a little gravely—"I didn't *do* any practice. Naughty Barb'a."

"What were you doing yesterday ?"

As she sat down he possessed himself quite naturally of one of her hands.

"Oh, just frivolling," she answered, "like Sunday."

"Like Sunday !"

"Well, I mean doing nothing in particular."

He was dashed. After a pause he said with a quiet voice, but unsteadily, "You made me very happy on Sunday."

Barbara let her glance fall upon the captured hand.

"Till after church," he ended timidly.

Some Pains and Penalties

She looked at him for an explanation, and he had to say, "I saw you walking home." He felt himself colour up and avoided her eyes.

"Oh, with—yes, Mr Varley; he spoke to me coming out, and Mrs Shuttlewell walked on."

Enoch was looking at her earnestly.

"So he was kind enough to see me home, and of course I had to ask him in." She pouted, to show that it meant nothing.

"Of course?" he questioned.

Barbara was fretted, without considering why, by the tremor in his voice. She answered with a frank intention that of course it was nicer to do so.

"But would you—do you mean because he just walked home with you?" said Enoch.

"Well, it was out of his way, you know. I thought it good of him."

"But—" He cast about helplessly for her point of view. "Any man would go out of his way," he laughed. "He came because he wanted to come."

"Do you think so?" she said hastily. "Oh, bother!" And presently, "I shall turn his face to the wall!" She jumped up as she spoke and reversed the photograph they had talked about. "Let him admire 'mself in the look'n'-glass." With a quick movement she ruffled Enoch's hair and suddenly sat down again, drumming with open hands upon her knees, and then taking a shy, quizzical look at him.

He might have compromised on this, of course. But until that moment he had not identified the portrait; and when he remembered how she had tried to get his opinion of it the touch of her hand jarred. He said miserably, "You have so many kind friends."

Barbara looked down her nose.

Barbara West

"I suppose"—his heart beat thickly—"that's why Sunday was 'nothing in particular.'"

He felt so much afraid of vexing her that all he desired was to be told she had not meant this; but after a pause she said simply and emphatically, "If you are jealous I sha'n't like you."

She denied that he was more to her than anyone else, then! She to him was more than all the world. "I can't help it if people are kind to me," she went on, still motionless with downcast eyes.

"Then I am not to love you," he got out.

She drew a quick breath. "Oh, for goodness' sake don't be stoopid!" she cried lightly, confounding him. Then with a crestfallen laugh she said, "It's like novels where everybody's sad and romantic, and all that. . . . But," she softened, "we did get rather spoony on Sunday. That was just a nice ickle weeny bit of nonsense, *for you and me.*"

After all, he was not too obstinately unreasonable. That droll apology not only lit a thin quick flame of pleasure, but satisfied him wholly.

"And," said Barbara, shyly, "oo shouldn't make me talk about it."

His impulse was to fling his arms about her. The little flame leaped high.

CHAPTER XIX

A MISSIONARY EXPOSTULATION

BEING forbidden to show true passion, and yet from time to time enheartened, our faint-heart hero hung about his innocent Circe in a quite ignoble dalliance.

Passion insists on hope while any hope remains. Allowed the right to hope, passion is soothed, governable and free of shame; for all who have the right stuff in them we know how it makes for nobleness of being. Let it be paltered with, suffered on any footing but that of plain honesty, and the secret hope in passion grows impatient and capable of mischief. It may still be governed, but not to be of healthy service. We are to see them both sophisticated by it.

In Barbara's mind the only study as the contest warmed was still to manage it.

Her little head managed all other things in the same way, with a liveliness of petty tact which dealt with every difficulty as it arose and passed it smoothly over. She was headstrong with an infinite gentleness of method; and so she had her way in most things, as with Mrs Shuttlewell—and was liked the better for it. Only when she could not have her way, as at home, did the restless will drive her to act determinately; and at any such pass she found herself acutely distressed. This disposition was all at the back of her physical virtue. So, of course, was every aid she could derive from self-respect and the merest prudence.

But, the footing on which Enoch stood with her being artificial, her kindness of heart (the very cause

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of all her tact) was the chief danger and aggravation for both of them. It had enlightened her, in some experience of male emprise, to the pleasure given by small concessions, no less than to the troublesome, disconcerting risk of making them. She indulged it with Enoch rather too freely for her after peace of mind ; and him it condemned to a sufferance his nature was not fashioned to endure.

Why was she so averse from thoughts of marriage ?

It would have been strange, perhaps, to find her forward to entertain them. Barbara was not romantic, and marriage, as she had seen it in her father's lifetime, seemed a kind of strife. It is true that she cast the blame for that upon the mother ; but all experience of hers warned her that men are apt to be wilful. One after another she had found her friends grow tiresome, either disposed to be exacting, or positively sulky, as if they wanted to blame *her*. She was sorry for some of them, but she had so many to please ; they should have been reasonable ! If you got married, said Barbara, of course you had to be sorry for them all ; and you couldn't have quite your own way about anything.

But the sheet-anchor was her music. Since her ninth year music had filled Barbara's thoughts of the future ; and the beginnings of public success were a dearer flattery than any that made philandering pleasant. The memory of a dead father whom she regretted at times with tears was sweetened by them. They were the dearer that, happily, she did not dream of becoming famous. The height of her ambition was to please, and every encore and engagement gratified it freshly. Now, marriage—if you insist on knowing all about it, which Enoch might do in vain—meant babies ; and babies were absurd ; you couldn't manage them a bit. Barbara sedately dismissed babies not only from

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the little world of concerts and lesson-giving, but from the scheme of things, feeling very womanly and wise.

To Enoch she began to be more than ever a riddle. Her modest fears of his insight were needless. Greater than all precautions the vulnerable sex can take is the rainbow veil that Nature draws across a lover's eyes. Also, this odd making up of her mind against marriage, so obstinate and never explained, perplexed him in measure as her small concessions told of trust and liking.

The more he pondered, the less he was happy to be trimmed with; and the notion of confessing Macdonald's creed to her struck him as a fine expedient. She was to see under a true light not only his own mind, but marriage—if he could but make her clearly understand. He began to cast about for the best way of doing so, but not with due anxiety. Minds so different as hers and his are not by argument to be suddenly attuned.

Calling on a fine afternoon in Villa Grove, he found her dressed for going out. She emerged from her room as soon as he stepped upon the mat, and met him with a queenly air of satisfaction, looking neat and sure of pleasing him. "I've been waiting for you," she said brightly. "I'm going to do some shopping; will you come?" So they sallied out and got upon the top of a tramcar. They were alone there, and he chose this very unsuitable place and season for his missioning. Or rather he did not choose at all. He was carried away by the naturalness of taking her out on a business errand.

"This is like housekeeping," he smiled.

She was critically considering, for the twentieth time, whether a pink silk bodice for summer outdoor wear would not look a little common. She returned the smile with a slight movement of acquiescence. After

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all, the right shade of pink, a soft rose-colour if she could get it—

"I shall call you 'my dear'," said he, with amazing boldness, "and look as if I were used to it. What will you call me?"

A quick look of happy amusement rewarded him. "I knew he would improve!" thought Barbara, and she cast about for a mutation of "Enoch," which name she had always found too solemn for anything, and just a little droll and bony. "Oh," she said, "I shall call you—Con: that's turning it round. Nice and short. Con is an Irish name, isn't it? Do you like it?"

"If you do," said he, watching her lips. "But I want a pet name for this occasion."

"It is a pet name," she insisted. "Don't you like it, really? 'Enoch' is such a Sunday name. I fink Con is rather good."

Instead of being duly thankful, he said quite lugubriously, "Ah, well! It's only play, I suppose."

Now, when a wooer nicely treated won't be cheerful, but sighs out of season much, he is tiresome. Barbara made a little gesture of smacking him on the hand.

"Isn't it?" he pressed.

"Isn't what?" said Barbara.

"All our courting play?"

"*Tien't* courting."

"For you it isn't," said Enoch, who told himself he was like the pelted frog in the fable.

Barbara, looking down at a pretty pair of boots with dignity, sat for a moment silent. Did she feel a touch of compunction, or was the clumsy wooing simply embarrassing? What she suddenly said was, "Oh, bother! I've got ever so many fings to fink of, an' you've made me go an' forget."

Thereupon he held his peace in meek bitterness, to

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which she added by popping her own penny into the fare-box. When he had thought about that for a minute or two he could either have got up and left her or surrendered all dignity in tears ; for he supposed that, being a man, he was entitled to pay for both. Barbara chatted humorously of people on the causeway.

"You can talk of other things," he said.

She consulted with herself a moment, and then pressed his hand, taking it on to her knee.

The sober gentleness of that *amende* was like a healing touch, though he knew that it meant no yielding. Had she let it suffice, he might have said no more, at this time, of what was in his mind ; but she made an excuse for him. "Poor old Con!" she cooed, after holding his hand a while. "Oo's such a *serious* boy."

"That's why I love you!" he burst out on a note of pain. "Love *must* be serious, Barbara, or it isn't love. . . . I think it should be like religion." And, after a pause, mastering his emotion, he poured out the new convictions like a man arguing for life on the edge of a gulf. "What I meant about play—you can't play with a feeling that comes—that nobody can get rid of by changing his mind ; you can't play with a natural—with love ; because it is meant—" He gulped and sought for words. "Love is the cause of life, isn't it? I mean, it is such a real and wonderful thing. . . . You're not vexed? I'm only trying to show you how I think about it. I—I've given up going to chapel or church ; what people call religion, I've lost it ; I can't—" He choked a sob down. "The things I understand. . . . Ah! I told you partly why. But this is so plain! I mean, if you can look at the world and see a big real purpose, it must be wrong to—to play with it and not—Oh, Barbara, you aren't meaning to let me go on always just a friend?"

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He was greatly excited, vaguely seeing people look up at them from the moving stream of a main thoroughfare, and not heeding it. He had fought out the words through a confusion of baffled shames, the greatest of which now seemed to be that he trembled extremely. Barbara's face in profile frightened him with its uncomprehending rueful look; she sat quite passive until he broke out with his appeal. The eyelash lifted then from her cheek; he perceived that she was even a little pale.

"Dear, you are hurting my hand," she said quietly. "No, don't take yours away! But of course we're too young to talk about such a thing." She spoke this sentence with a quick flutter of the voice. Ah! Much kinder (had she been able) to say outright that she did not love him as he required of her.

"It isn't that," he replied. "I don't want you to marry me now, soon; I could wait; I think I could wait ten years if I knew that you—that we—"

"Oh, I don't think long engagements are good," said Barbara wistfully, in haste to save herself without offending him.

He thought that she was hesitating.

"You see," he said, "I love you so dearly; I think of nothing else, hardly, and you said you never meant to marry at all; but"—he laughed, with a strong endeavour to feel at ease—"that's just what I can't think."

"But I know," said Barbara.

"Yes, of course you mean it; but if some day—if someone else"—and then with sudden clearness he grew eloquent. "I can't give you up, Barbara! That is, if you love me as—as you sometimes seem to do. I cannot; you are so very beautiful, and so good; ah, if I could tell you! You don't know. It's as if you were

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made to be loved. Everything you say, the way you say it even, every least little thing you do, keeps me longing, aching. I loved you as soon as I saw you, that night with Jack Darbyshire; you know you can do as you like with me! Only don't—you won't pretend with me for mere kindness' sake, will you?"

To this confession Barbara had listened with smiling lips and downcast eyes; her ears burned at it; it gave her an exquisite delight. But she started at the searching question and clasped his hand nervously.

"I do like you very much," she murmured.

He controlled himself, suddenly aware of the regular beat of horses' hoofs and the cool air blowing. "Not love me?" he hazarded; and then came a dreadful pause, that seemed to be minutes long.

"Why did you stay away, then?" she said, and dared a glance at him. "I told you I had made up my mind, dear."

"For that reason, I think," he answered, losing courage; "because I thought you were putting me off. Of course I know now that you . . . you say so; but how can anyone be so sure? It is—you are so good and loving, it is dangerous! It makes me think someone you like . . . better, may persuade you—against your will, I mean. . . ."

The final words, if he could, he would have recalled as soon as they were uttered.

"I fink you should trust me," said Barbara, reddening.

"I do," he declared, "since I've got to understand you;" and he believed that he spoke the whole truth. "Still, if one is trying to go against Nature—"

But his opportunity was at an end. She pressed his hand, saying, "We get down here, dear;" and he realised with a gasp that he had made no headway with the argument.

Barbara West

Yet she had never been so nice, or he so tenderly conscious of the romance that feeds upon self-abnegation, as they were that day. It was a day to live in both their memories, with strangely differing values in the afterglow. Barbara, troubled not to have been able to soothe him as at other times, was less talkative, pressed close to his side so as often to touch him, and spoke with a deference. If she had not fallen in love she did sincerely like him; and she had been penetrated by his pleading as by a larger flattery, which left her grateful because she was obliged to respect him.

She drew him aside affectionately to look into windows, and made much of his opinion on mantles, and hats, and lace, and some kinds of needlework. He preferred not to enter the shops with her, being too shy for that; but she told him as they came to each of them what it was she wanted there, and what she meant to do with it; he was privileged to look with her in imagination upon the charming effect to be produced; and when she came forth with her purchases, it was always to entertain him, half in self-gratulation and half in apology for delay, with some triumph over the shopmen and shopgirls, who, it appeared, had tried to prevent her buying what she wanted. He, being indifferent to the real interest of these matters, and amused only because they were new and feminine, believed he yielded to Barbara's mere wish to have done with his own high topic.

Thus, the more she coaxed and made fun, the more he got to feel that he carried a cheerful face over a failing heart. She had never seemed so womanly, so like his idea of what a wife might be, so quietly winsome;—and she was not for him! An indefinable sense of charm showed in her manner and lit her eyes: he told himself that it was meaningless, and shivered at the stab of

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that conviction. The worst mischief was, that she had to leave him so long in the street. No doubt it served as a useful exercise in patience; for all his sex there are occasions when they similarly profit; but it gave him time to pity his case, and after a while to wonder how she talked to the shopmen. Was she equally nice with them?

In the end Barbara caught him looking dull, and refused to let him carry another parcel. As he had only two small ones, which dangled easily from the middle finger of one hand, this added refinement to rigour. But she had finished shopping, and she said so, telling him he had been very good; whereupon he at once excelled himself and offered her tea at Pologni's, a confectioner's shop of the very selectest levy.

Pologni's awed him to a better humour.

It was a place of severe and carpeted luxury, of bronze statuettes and fine foliage plants; and to his horror he saw no men there. As they entered an inner apartment he wanted to check Barbara and ask if that was not the ladies' room; besides, the little tables were all taken, he was sure, and amid the buzz of chatter he caught some frightful snatches pitched in artificial tones. But she advanced serenely upon all that millinery, and perforce he followed her—expecting to be turned back ignominiously. This nightmare only passed when the stylish waitress, who had followed them to a curtained recess, presented the bill of fare with indifference.

"Tea, please," said Barbara, calmly, "and some cakes and things." She did not even look at the bill, but passed it over to him between two fingers, beginning at once to take her gloves off. Not to be singular, he laid it aside and said, "Yes, that will do for me too, thank you."

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It is true that Barbara seemed to talk for talking's sake, and thus, in appearing quite at home, made him the more a stranger to her. But he forgot this in seeing her feast again upon sweetmeats. The fact was, that she did not guess him shy of the place, but thought he had made up his mind to feel unhappy. In the midst of some tattling about music in the parks she startled him by speaking low and soberly,—

"Don't be miserable, dear, because it makes me so. I know you've been very good to me. You shall be my brother, Con, and I'll tell you all my secrets. Will you?"

How his heart leaped! In a blindness of happy tears he kissed her hand for all to see who cared.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE LISTS

THAT was the last time he pressed Barbara to marry him ; for better or worse the home-bred, tractable youth surrendered as soon as he had spoken fully.

What cowed him was to find her apparently quite unmoved when he had been profoundly shaken and she had seen him so.

But her sympathetic grave tone in the restaurant, a tone she had never used before, was balm to him. After baring his heart, he felt that for all time to come she must compassionate him. At his next visit she gave him both hands, and they stood with fingers interlaced quite a long time, saying tender things very cheerfully without any need of looking in each other's eyes. He found himself at ease, marvellously reconciled to her way with him, wishful, quite unselfishly, to give her pleasure.

But the weeks did not go like a honeymoon.

He was with her daily, from the earliest moment after his mid-day breakfast to the hour of going down to the office, which he delayed as often as he dared by avoiding the common tea-table. Her diminished practice with the violin was done in a morning. When a pupil came he slipped away into the other room, which had now become a bedroom in the manner at first imagined by her ; and, the pupil gone, she found him pale, inert, with a sick face of patient anguish that reproached her. At other times he hardly gave her time to shut the door ;

Barbara West

she was greatly frightened, first of him, afterwards of herself.

It was a little matter that there were no kisses, no deliberate temptings of any sort, not a word to own to each other the pulse and generous tide of puissant life. This overwhelmed them each all the same. Their silence gave it way. Such an intercourse tended more and more to be absorbed in that physical emotion which, in honest love, is its immanent freight of happiness ; in theirs, apart, was a mere maceration of the mind and spirit.

To Barbara, with her childish appetites, these weeks meant hardly more than over-indulgence. To Enoch, ardent, capable of lively and strong enterprises, they were a stultification. His work was now become a function without zeal. He had sometimes to read a piece of news twice and thrice in order to catch the sense of it and write his paragraph of summary ; he got away from the talks with Macdonald and Penny in a morning, caring for neither talk nor friendship any longer ; and yet his love-making, with all its continence and sentiment, did not entitle him to decorations.

It was in these days that if he had said again, in a good moment, " Let us marry," Barbara could not utterly have refused him. But he had no suspicion of a change in her when he himself was of one mind from the beginning.

Would these two have married for better ? Let those who have the gift of imagination think out for themselves the fretful rebellion of Barbara's first child-bearing and the plight of our censorious and touchy hero, not without capacity for righteous anger.

CHAPTER XXI

A SCREEN SCENE

MR PRINCE VARLEY was the most distinguished of a little *coterie* of cads who frequented the Blue Boar, admired there for a robust flashiness. Most of them were prodigal sons of men who had made their way in trade—sons indulged with easy pockets instead of that portion of the inheritance which some day might belong to them. Remark in this the cunning triumph of civilisation over pastoral simplicity in the parable. Doubtless the qualities which make a way in trade are not the greatest; it is, indeed, matter of common observation that men may possess them and fail to rear grateful sons; but, at anyrate, the prodigal is kept at home. He consorts with his swine under the paternal eye. It has even been discovered that to do so is a part of education, and the compassionate father pays the fees.

Mr Varley and his fellows were bent upon an exhibition of their breeding.

They let you see that there was nothing sordid in it. Because their unpretentious old dads minded their businesses and spoke dialect, you were to mark well that the sons had nevertheless inherited some fine English virtues—good generous blood, a liking for sport, and as to morals, no damned humbug. The Blue Boar had the benefit of this protest because it was the oldest first-class house in Merchanton. On market days it filled with business men, on Saturday nights the commoner sort of flashy youth on weekly wages pushed

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in among a pack of painted women ;—our patriots lent their countenance to both occasions, superior, but of easy virtue in regard to either—heartly good fellows, but having their own standards, with a hint in their buckish behaviour of things not generally known and shared. They extremely admired the old hard-drinking squirearchy of a romantic past, and were on terms with several bookmakers. It was, you will see, an act of patronage to be in Merchanton at all, a place of money-grubbing gospel-grinders. Their compensation was to introduce a little civilisation. They carried on a crusade of gallant adventure, at once the natural pleasantry of manly spirits bearing all before them, and a sign of their cosmopolitan vogue.

The distinction of Mr Prince Varley consisted in the fact that his part in all they did and relished was comparatively a quiet one. To be phlegmatic is not an attribute of greatness ; but it passed for a mark of breeding in a loud society where the unimportance of things was understood.

With a certain pliability of temper and a drawl, Mr Varley's languid manner so concealed his Yorkshire origin as to catch the secret envy of his friends. For he had not consciously acquired but only cultivated it ; it was a boon derived with some others from his mother, and convincingly aristocratic. Mr Varley senior, a plain-looking man of red and grumpy aspect, short and overfed, had certainly done his best in time past to cuff and kick it out of him. But the "Podge Varley" of those days, cowed by one parent, by the other pampered most affectionately, was grown in the course of nature to be a formidable, well-groomed, fleshy personage, living up as well as he could to a feebly-florid conception of his baptismal dignity. He had attained to something between Beau Nash and a tall footman.

A Screen Scene

The portrait on Barbara's mantelpiece did, as she said, do him some injustice. It was an abuse of words to call his look insolent. Bored and dull, if you will; disillusioned, if you like the word better, for many things occurred to disappoint and worry him. The suggestion under his pose of a placid affability was simply that there is nothing in life worth two thoughts. When he walked, his forward bend from the hips, together with the bottle slope of his shoulders, gave him the footman air of being led by a chain from the neck; but inasmuch as he rode daily into town, at a foot pace, in order to wear breeches, Mr Varley may have cultivated this walk for its suggestion of "For'ard away." There were rings on his fingers, a flower in his coat, something well bred in his necktie, and pomade on his hair; so that when he was seated and hatless you saw the beau. And, with the aid of a purplish complexion, he bloomed.

Barbara's Mr Armitage made her acquainted with him. The introduction had to be effected lest Mr Prince Varley, knowing his friend to be rather a gay dog, should misbehave.

She liked his deportment. It was respectful—to the point even, when they were alone, of humility and a sad-eyed tenderness. This confessed admiration of her; and he continued to pay her the most decorous attentions. His splendid person seemed to be offered as her obedient slave. It was, in fact, the obedient slave of all the subject sex who were not purchaseable; the manner implied that to be virtuous is pathetic. He cast a wistful eye on "happiness," and said without words how fondly dear 'twould be if he were not too nobly-minded—or the lady too mistrustful. He was a pious martyr, dumbly and respectfully pleading commiseration for his piety.

Barbara West

When by "happiness" is meant a purely selfish gratification, this attitude is coarsely hypocritical. Paine's eager cackle was honest by comparison.

But in Christian countries the word hypocrite, which once elsewhere described an actor, is reserved as a brand for those who ape religion. The sham Puritan, with his snuffle and whine, is laughed at; the sensualist who languishes, invested with romance. Whence this interesting difference? Are we agreed to—

Compound for sins we are inclined to
By damning those we have no mind to?

It may be so. You have also to reflect that there is no profession of sexual religion; nor can there be any, more than of honour itself.

See, however, the advantage enjoyed by the sensual hypocrite over his labelled fellow. Women know his type without stigmatising it; among men, and it may be among the most honourable men, he securely passes muster because men do not see his feigning. Moreover he beguiles agreeably, and does more mischief than your Puritan. For, of all respectful attitudes, his to a sympathetic simple girl is the most seductive. She has yet to learn that no such tragedy airs can manifest the lover—that he sets her far too high for that—and she may well suppose the hinted martyrdom a natural thing. Mr Prince Varley believed it to be so.

An old scene of comedy was played in Barbara's rooms one day, consequent upon a little device of hers adopted in a hurry.

Mrs Shuttlewell tapped at the door and said, as she opened it mysteriously, "There's a gentleman wantin' to see yo'. Varley, I think he said."

"Oh, good gracious!" Barbara said to Enoch. . . .

A Screen Scene

"Go in there, dear! I won't let him stay;" and aloud, "Oh, yes; show him in, Mrs Shuttlewell."

Enoch seized his hat and darted to the curtains, protesting. "Why not have said you were engaged?"

Barbara motioned him eagerly to hide.

"Sh!—I want your opinion," she said with her lips, but did not so persuade him that his plight was interesting.

The humour of a situation of this kind is lost upon the man in hiding when he lacks tranquillity. Enoch was privileged to hear a dull, pretentious fellow commending himself absurdly; that is to say, Mr Varley, wishful that a pretty girl who knew him slightly should value his attentions, let fall from time to time a hint of his social standing, and otherwise made himself ridiculous in the way that snobbish men will use with womankind. Barbara's politeness, being of a very indulgent order, compelled her to listen while she wished to be rid of him; and her predicament, at least, is entertaining. But Enoch stood behind the curtains of green damask with a face of much despondency, all ears. This was the "rather nice, good-looking" fellow, who was "so big," whose people were well-to-do, and whom Barbara had led indoors because he walked home with her from church. Enoch was neither big nor well-to-do, and Barbara had never said he was good-looking.

The wool-merchant's son made his entrance with an appalling ease of manner, and his voice was cheerfully unsympathetic and heavy. Enoch detected an odour of scent and cigars. His "How *ah* you?" overbore the rather fussy welcome that Barbara gave him.

"Lovely day," he drawled, on Armitage's artificial note. "I couldn't pass without a call, Miss West. Not busy, I *hope*."

Barbara West

"It is very kind of you to think of me," said Barbara, prettily. ("I couldn't say I *was* busy, of course," she pointed out afterwards. "I didn't ask him to sit down.")

"Now, that sounds sarcastic," he answered. "But 'pon my honna, Miss West, I've been as busy as a working man at a pound a week, I have indeed. Thought about you every day, dear girl, for all that."

"Please don't be silly," said Barbara, with easy indifference. "You've called for your stick?"

"My stick? By Jove, I've been looking for that stick in every p—everywhere, high and low. I say, I'm awfully obliged to you; it was a present from a lady, you know. Ha, ha! I shall call it a present from Miss B. W. now."

Here Darbyshire, in Enoch's place, would have had his first broad grin.

"Indeed," cried Barbara, "I don't allow you to do anything of the kind, Mr Varley;" but Enoch, with a burning face, clenched his teeth. The conceited cad!

"Oh, just as you like, of course," said Mr Varley, a little surprised; "but, I say, you're rather too rough on a fellow. I called to pay my respects, my dear, and to see you all bright and right. Hullo, you've got two rooms. May I peep?"

As Enoch drew back, panic-struck, Barbara's quick answer sounded quite near him. "That is my bedroom," she said.

"Oh, beg pardon."

Then there was a little silence. "What a jolly arrangement," he commented.

Enoch, trembling after that sharp alarm, was moved by extraordinary anger; and to his horror Barbara answered, with the pleasantest accent of her girlish voice, "Do you think so?"

A Screen Scene

"I think it awfully jolly," said the man-about-town, solemnly; and then she had the wit to change the subject.

She pitched upon the flower in his button-hole; what was it?

"Do you like flowers?" said he.

The question being innocent, she answered carelessly, "I like them very much when they smell nice."

"I'll send you some up," he promptly offered. "We have a greenhouse full."

"Oh, pray don't trouble," said Barbara.

"Shall be simply glad to clear them out, my dear; no trouble at all."

Hearing the last words pronounced rather like a grunt, and then the creak of a chair, Enoch knew that Mr Varley was making himself at home; and raged against his impudence.

Barbara acknowledged the kindness.

"Not at all," he went on. "The governor must do something with his money. I can't spend it all, you know, though quite willing. 'Pon my honna, I think we've got nearly an acre of glass."

"So much?"

"The old boy's quite mad on it. *My* fancy is a good horse, now. I bought a beauty last week." And skilfully, as if the thought had just occurred to him, he asked, "May I call for you some day with the dog-cart?"

Barbara was getting nervous. "Oh, I think not, Mr Varley," she said appealingly.

"Why? I should like a drive with you awfully."

"You see, I am so busy," she made excuse.

"Not too busy for one short drive, Miss West. Fix your own time, you know. Do. It's a spanking turnout, though I say so."

Barbara West

"You are very good, but really I'd rather not."

"Have I offended you?" said Mr Varley.

"No. Why should you think so?"

"Then I may hope."

To this clumsy and persistent coarse persuasion Enoch had listened with his heart in his mouth. Barbara made an effort again to turn the conversation: her visitor's manner threatened to be sentimental, and she did not wish Enoch to be disturbed by it needlessly. "I've got two more pupils," she was telling him, "so my time is pretty well occupied now." She added: "Of course I don't charge as much as I ought to, really; but you can't make people understand how expensive music is. They think they're paying such a lot for just one half-hour a week; but I practise and study twenty or thirty hours a week—more, when I'm very good."

"What a deuced shame!" said Mr Prince Varley.

"Oh, I like it, or else of course I shouldn't do it. Still, I mean I ought to be paid well."

Why, raged Enoch, did she talk of her affairs in that way to a stranger? Wasn't he a stranger? It was treating him like an old friend!

"Don't you think so?" she asked.

"My dear, you ought to have as much money as ever you want."

Of course! She might have known he would make some cursed familiar answer.

"Well, I have as much as I want," Barbara declared.

"Yes, but, hang it all! 'tisn't the thing, you know, a pretty girl working like a nigger all day. I don't like it."

He didn't like it!

"Do you know what I should do if I had my way?" he pursued.

"Oh, never mind that, please. You are too sentimental."

A Screen Scene

"Ah, well," sighed Mr Varley, in the voice of vain regrets, "perhaps better not."

But Enoch Watson, although he knew nothing of Mr Prince Varley, divined his meaning by antipathy. Moreover, when he had listened for half-an-hour to this kind of conversation, it dawned upon him—and his mortification was profound—that Barbara had small regard for his patience. He was to wait there indefinitely, as if his convenience mattered nothing. She wanted an "opinion" of this insufferable snob; he was of so much importance. When Mr Prince Varley went away, pleasantly dismissed at the garden gate, and Barbara came back to him for sisterly consultation with a smile half roguish, half apologetic, he was ready with the first word.

"You *might* have left the key of the other door in the lock."

"You are vexed, Con," she said, going up to him quickly. "It is a nuisance, dear, but you saw how I tried to get rid of him."

"Well!" he gasped.

"I couldn't tell him to go," she pointed out, "but I kept snubbing him. I'm awfully sorry, dear. He was very stupid."

He could not let her make so light of it. "I don't understand you, Barbara," he said, choking, and let his arms hang loose instead of taking her hands.

She gave him a quick glance. "You are jealous, Con!" she accused.

"I! Jealous of that lout?"

"You are shouting, dear. . . . If you get angry I shall think you don't love me. I know you are jealous, or you wouldn't look like that." She did not give him her eyes, but stood with a chill face half averted.

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"Oh," he said bitterly, "I know I've no right to say anything."

Thereupon, with a little movement of would-be propitiation, she took hold upon the lapels of his coat. "Don't be unkind, dear. I don't like him," she said quietly.

"I can't see why you let him come here!" cried Enoch, on the edge of tears.

It was now she pointed out, indulgently, that she had not asked him to sit down.

"You might have been engaged," he ran on. "A man like that has no right to speak to you. He came of his own accord; you were not obliged to see him."

She listened poutingly, because his voice was getting clamant again, and she did not know what to make of the note of pain in it. "I can't be rude, Con," she explained; "and indeed he is very gentlemanly. . . . Why do you look so strange? Oh, I hope you're not jealous like this always. . . . I believe I'm going to cry!"

She suddenly laid her cheek upon his breast, stupefying him with the smooth touch and odour of her hair. He put up his hands to her shoulders, and perhaps a minute went by before he could be sure of his voice.

"Yes, I am jealous," he said then, gently. "But it isn't for myself, Barbara; it's for you—for you." He had begun to stroke back the wavy hair from her temples. "Can't you see? I love you too much to be selfish. I know I shall never get you." With that he had to wait again, a sob having shaken him. "If some day you liked another fellow well enough to marry him"—she moved her head beneath his hand, dissenting from this repeated fancy—"I'm only saying so to show you—if I knew that he would make you happy—"

"But Mr Varley isn't a sweetheart; he's only a friend," she interrupted drowsily.

A Screen Scene

"Ah, let me speak!" he cried, and presently went on: "If I were sure you would be happy, do you think I should complain? I should just go away—to some place. . . . I should be glad!"

His tears were falling on her forehead. She slipped her arms about his neck, and might have kissed him, but he would not let her raise her face. "Oh, silly boy, to cry," she said instead.

"It isn't that," he got out. "I can't be sure of a case like that. You are so kind to this awful cad; I can't make it out. Surely you see what a cad he is, what he thinks of you—Oh! . . . But I'll shoot him before it comes to that."

"Con, I forbid you to think of such a thing," she cried, and freed herself, facing him in great alarm. "What dreadful nonsense! You seem to think I can't take care of myself." She dropped her eyes, reddening painfully. "Oo should *trust* me."

"Forgive me, dear," he said, faltering, ashamed. "I do trust you. . . . But you seemed to say—I mean letting him . . . send you flowers, and sit there talking . . . That about the bedroom . . ."

"Oh, you poor boy, you are crazy about me!" He suddenly felt her soft palms for an instant press his face between them, and that quick caress had the value of a shaking of hands upon some bargain.

He could not persevere with his unthankful part of mentor; and Barbara, glad that he was silent, affectionately anxious to have him satisfied, began to pull Mr Prince Varley to pieces in her own way.

CHAPTER XXII

PAINE'S WINDFALL

ON the following Sunday night Enoch went with Barbara to church, and so, as it were, bowed the knee in the House of Rimmon.

It was not in order to get the better of Mr Varley. He had, indeed, for some weeks now been careful when not at work to forestall that pretender at the church door after service; and, on the single occasion of Mr Varley's rival presence, there had been no difficulty. It is true that in proposing to go Enoch imagined pleasantly the triumph of coming out with her. Barbara guessed that he did, and eagerly said yes to his request, with a secret sense of owing him some amends. But the truth about his going to church also is, that even for an hour and a half he could not now forego her company. Why, indeed, deny himself a share in this part of her life?

He had a great contention with distaste, however, and with his troubled conscience. Not to stand in a false light with Barbara, he assured her that he only went to church because she went.

"Oh, but you should go to church, dear," she admonished.

"I wish I could believe as you do," said he; and she felt a little gush of missionary pleasure.

He had been singularly touched by a discovery made the week before. Once or twice she had left his arms to go into her bedroom, and there had remained awhile. Her silence, and the face of self-control with which she

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would return, piqued his curiosity, and he peeped at length through the curtain. Then he was greatly ashamed. Barbara stood reading in a pocket Bible which he had seen upon her dressing-table.

By this he knew that she was tempted no less than he, and with that knowledge his admiration of her touched its height.

Her device for getting strength to resist might be a simple one; in his unsympathetic eyes it looked, indeed, like a bit of ritual and superstition, equivalent to the use of a rosary, especially when afterwards he found the book open, face downwards, at a chapter of Judges; but all the same it set him thinking again upon all the old most elementary problems, with a dismal wish to be done with them.

When he now considered Mr Prince Varley, it was to ask uneasily, as he had asked with respect to Paine, why the Creator of this world permitted evil in it.

Why, since He was greater than the Devil—if there was a Devil—why did He let the Devil have his frightful way at all? Why not have made man proof against wiles and perfectly happy, or chained the Devil up? In view of Barbara's innocence the case was distracting. That God is, the sad philosopher was not so constituted as to doubt, because life, and the beauty of the world, were greater marvels in his eyes than what perplexed him. It may be said that he felt the vileness in other men and the defects of his own conduct (the distinction is nice) only as a harsh note in harmony, and not as the keynote. Barbara was the harmony at its sweetest. But, away from her, he dwelt upon this single note without hearing the full chord.

Enoch's simple whys might all, of course, have been resolved in one—Why was man endowed with a measure of choice and will? Hopefully, he worshipped

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Barbara and gave it up. Reason in young men who are impulsive has little influence on conduct ; education and the instincts guide them while it ripens ; and before he got so much as an inkling of new light Enoch was to see "the wicked flourish like a green bay tree" in the person of Paine.

One grey morning he had Darbyshire for a companion in the walk home. The reporter had come in late from a distant county cricket match and waited for him ; Jack felt that they were getting separated and guessed that Enoch was in deep waters with Barbara.

In a provincial town, when the night-worker in a newspaper office goes home, the chances are that he sees only cats abroad. They take possession of the empty streets. It is a belief of people who keep within doors at such hours that cats are noisy. On the contrary, they are for the most part ghostly silent. The world condemns the whole tribe, as its way is, for the extravagances of a scandalous few. As light creeps in upon the town, your well-fed cat is discovered in the middle of the road, or on the causeway, more sedate in her solitude than on a hearthrug. Starveling cats, persecuted cats, take alarm at the solitary man who comes their way, and crouch fearfully, or sulkily disappear ; she, self-respecting, maintains the ancient seisin of the cat community and obliges the intruder to step aside. Sometimes he comes upon a little Quakers' meeting of cats, sagely meditative. Even in waste places where no cats are, there is but one more shameful outlaw than the late sub-editor himself—the lost sheep-dog, to wit, travelling darkly down the road at a long trot ; if you look at him with attention he swerves and runs into a side street howling.

Descending one echo-haunted street to go through the pale heart of the town, Darbyshire and Enoch saw a man

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pitch head foremost across the whole width of it and collapse against a shop front. At fifty yards' distance the crash he made, striking the blue shutters, was loud enough to startle them; and then they heard him laugh.

"Good man!" said Darbyshire. "Good hard head!"

But when they went to help him up, behold! it was Paine; and that put another colour on the incident. He had got upon his hands and knees, and he looked aside at their boots as they came near.

"Are you hurt, old man?" cried the gentle Darbyshire, and went to feel at his crown.

Paine slipped into a sitting posture, supporting himself with one hand. He said merrily that it was all right, he had trodden on his hat. He repeated that it was all right, with a manner that gently deprecated fuss. Get a new one when shops opened. Enoch observed that his forehead shone like butter, and his cheeks like the paler kind of sausage; and the pimples had such a very unhealthy look that he marvelled at his friend's sympathetic way of touching the man, which struck him as beautifully kind without overcoming his own repugnance.

Darbyshire took his colleague under the arms, saying, "Come on, old man; make an effort," and Paine collapsed in a mild fit of laughter. To get him on his feet Enoch was obliged to lend a hand, and Darbyshire then commissioned him to prop the reveller up while he crossed the street for the flattened hat. Paine pushed him off and balanced on his heels, but immediately reached out and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Why . . . 's young Watson!" he said. "Oh, now—now we'll have some fun. Come along, young Watson, we'll have champagne." He fell upon Enoch's neck with the weight of a full sack. "Have champagne and be friends again. No b—no bashful hesitation; I'm now a man of substance. . . . Where's the other fellow 'at

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was talkin'? But *you'll* come. He, he! 'And when he was yet a great way off,'" said Paine with a chuckle, "'a great way off, his father saw him.' Nev' mind the hat. . . . Ah, Jack! That you? No; leave the hat. 'S gone flat, consequence bein' trod on."

"Wear it, dear boy," said Darbyshire, putting it on for him. "Protect your head against things. Now we'll see you home."

Paine said it was absurd to go home, and hung back against their arms, explaining that he knew a place where they could get champagne and kill the fatted calf. Jack was too energetic, missed the point, he said; young Watson was dry with eating husks in a famine.

"Push him along," said Darbyshire, and they went off at a round pace up the hill, Paine laughing at the sense of flight this gave him.

His protests continued at intervals. By the time they were at the top he was crying, "No, no; we're going wrong," and letting his legs trail. In the midst of a square they tumbled him down on the step of a certain monument and looked at one another anxiously, much blown. Enoch remembered afterwards what a cool clean air the morning had, and how at the first touch of dawn the little factory town was beautiful. For one fine moment of a clear daybreak in summer, even Merchanton may vie with Stamboul. Spires and chimney tops, gables and the glass roofs of weaving sheds, are touched by the first thin rays quite suddenly, and redden and gleam in a picture of which all the infinite small detail beside is fairly blue. This blue is like enchantment, a mysterious tone of the air itself; one sees the nearest object purple, the most distant no bluer than forget-me-nots.

Paine was troubled by a recollection. He wanted to go back and talk to a man that knew some riddles. This

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joker said, Why was a dead man like fourpence-ha'penny? *Dam* funny! The funny thing was the ha'penny. The man would have told him the answer all right, but he, Paine, wanted the door open to think properly, and the silly beggars locked him out. He proposed that Enoch and Darbyshire should go and break the windows. The people would be sure it was he, and when they came out—he wouldn't be there!

"Too thin, dear boy," said Darbyshire. "Why are two dead men like ninepence? Hoist him up, Watson."

A policeman, after the manner of his kind standing in a doorway so as not to be seen until they reached him, recognised them, and lent a hand for a little way. Never was help more welcome. But they had to take up the burden again from the limit of his beat.

"Now, you go quietly home to bed, Mr Paine," he advised. "You're in very good hands, sir."

Paine insisted on tipping him. "I want speak to this intellectual young officer," said he. "Le' go my arms; I'll make him a present, he's been out all night; he's toiled all night and caught nothing. Here, officer! I'll—I'll produce a miraculous tanner." But he was so long fishing in his pockets that Darbyshire had to work the miracle on his behalf.

As they moved on, steering heavily, he said that he wouldn't affront Darbyshire by offering to pay him the debt. He would buy him a gold-headed walking-stick, to walk straight with. "Spirit-level in the handle," put in Jack; a joke so unfortunately timed that Paine went down upon his knees to have the laugh out. The duty of the Good Samaritan and his ass began to look formidable. They puffed and considered it.

"This is a caution," Darbyshire owned. "We shall get him home with the milk, about. Queer. Been *sober* since the widow took him on! As a rule he carries

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liquor like an old pirate." And now his friend young Watson disappointed Jack with an uncharitable speech of some coarseness. "Oh, let's leave the swine!" said he. His thought was: "He is a swine, and he thinks he has the better of decent fellows. Let him wallow."

But, for his soul's welfare, Enoch had to go through with the work of mercy. Darbyshire twirled an end of his blonde moustache with a hand that shook from over-exertion, and his blue eyes fell upon Paine. "Can't do that," he said; "the poor old beggar's helpless."

"It's his own fault," said Enoch, sulkily, "and he's proud of it."

"Well, of course," was the ambiguous answer; "but we'll see him home all right. I hope he's got a latch-key. Sit up, old man; sit up a minute and give us your keys."

Under way once more, they had an explanation of his special delight in that night's debauchery. Darbyshire saying that he had never seen him so full, Paine replied with deliberation,—

"My boy, I'm celebrating solemn occasion. Tomorrow morning I sh'll go down to the blaasted office and pay old Ireton the sum of fourteen pounds sterling, tell him to leave immejetly. Month's salary in lieu of notice. I sh'll then order in champagne and wet it; an' we'll have a pair of lobsters fo' tea, to show there's no malice."

"Yes, you're full," said Darbyshire; "feel it too, every pound. Hold up; I'm getting a crick in the ribs."

"Then we'll sit down again!" And Paine, for his part, did so.

They despaired.

"I've never," he laughed, "been so drunk since I was a boy of fifteen. It's a celebration. I know you

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fellows want go to bed. Nev' mind, I—I'll give you han'some present."

Darbyshire said that he would take old Ireton's screw for choice.

"Tisn't *Ireton's* screw!" cried Paine, with a little scream of delight. "It's mine."

"All the same," said Darbyshire, not understanding.

"No, no," Paine explained with a chuckle. "You don't tumble. I'm a man of substance. 'S my little joke. Now, you're sure you won't tell anybody?"

Menaced with the arch forefinger they swore themselves to secrecy.

"Well, then, I shall tell you. There's somebody dead."

"Left you any money?"

"Lef' me," said Paine, after a gleeful pause, and smacked the flags for emphasis, "five thousand pounds do what I like with."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Well," said Darbyshire, "I'm awfully glad, old chap," and charmingly disregarding of the drunken man's absurd position he offered Paine his hand.

Paine climbed up with the aid of it, saying that this was the happiest day in his life, while Enoch, albeit there was no spice of envy in his composition, stood by without a civil word to say.

"What stunning luck!" Darbyshire turned to him. "My, if somebody left *me* five thousand pounds! What think?"

"I think there'd be some sense in it," he answered.

"Hear that, you bounder!" cried Jack. "Blest if I don't take your life! . . . Got a thou' or two on your person? Show it us, Paine."

But it appeared that the fortune was not yet paid over.

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Through the window of Paine's lodging—a place to which he had lately moved—they caught the flicker of a good fire, and the door was opened to them by a woman, perhaps in her twenty-fifth year, whose gentle-eyed beauty and the natural concern with which she looked at him obliged them both to respect her. Paine greeted her, too, with a touch of shame in his affectionate manner. To Enoch, who had heard that she was not his wife and who knew so little of unhappy women, the instant in which her soft appearance prepossessed him, Paine saying, sheepishly, "Hello, Dolly! Oh, you sh'd have gone to bed, my dear"—was bizarre. A fear that she would ask them to enter the house made him uncomfortable in the same way that a penny show had once done, in which you were invited to touch the abnormality.

Darbyshire brightly said, "He's all right, Mrs Templeton. Legs a bit rummy, so we lent him a share of four, that's all."

"Oh, that was very good of you," she replied. Her manner was free of either coquetry or ill-humour, and Enoch noted that she turned at once to Paine again with a look of inquiry. He was to tell her what to do! She wore a pretty loose robe; even at that late hour her hair, in a thick plait like a girl's, had the look of being freshly done, and she was only a little wan in the morning light.

In they went, stumbling up three high steps into a narrow passage. Paine's hat was transferred by Darbyshire to a peg, and Paine himself deposited in a great arm-chair. It was something of a shock to Enoch that the room looked home-like and tidy, like any room of similar pretensions in another house. He was glad to see that Darbyshire kept his own hat in his hand, prepared to depart. Supper had been laid and there was an open novel on the table—Lytton's *Zanoni*. The

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vigil they had ended struck him as a little pathetic for its faithfulness to such a creature as Paine was. He could only marvel.

"There, old man," said Darbyshire. "Now you're right. Unless we take him upstairs, Mrs Templeton? Yes, better do so, eh?"

"Oh, no," she answered, evidently ashamed of Paine's helplessness. "We shall manage very well. Besides, he must have some supper."

"Course!" cried Paine. "We'll all have supper."

And they had to stay. Paine exhibited strong reserves of energy in obliging them to do so. He would hear of no excuses, and got upon his feet to wave them all aside; it was, he repeated, a celebration. Never mind the time. What sort of a pal's trick was it to run away? And when the three men were left together, while his mistress went for plates and glasses, his face lighted up. "Don't say anything," he whispered; "you leave it to me. Dolly knows nothing." He signified in ecstatic gestures that they would see some fun, and lapsed into the chair again, saying, "Sh-sh-sh! . . . Here she comes."

While she arranged the table he watched her with a smile of extraordinary radiance. It was noteworthy that she scarcely looked at him, for doubtless she had a conception of Paine with which drunkenness did not accord, some idea not inconsistent with respect.

Enoch was grateful to Darbyshire for keeping up a conversation. His wonder to see her quite unlike all general notions of the courtesan, and so meek — so "wifely," according to another notion — prevented the reflection that only a simple and yielding nature could have accepted her situation first and last. Moreover he felt the situation as an injustice. Paine was not entitled to any woman's devotion, whether in wedlock or

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out of it. Her voice was sweet and softly pitched. She had quiet eyes of a limpid blue, rather full, under a clear brow; her mouth indicated refinement; and the oval face, if it lacked animation and colour, had the beauty of regular outlines. He was startled to see among the rings on her white and supple hands a new wedding ring—Paine's irregular gift. His cheeks burned. What would Barbara think of his coming to such a house? What would his father think?

As it was said long ago, if you look well there is some soul of goodness always to be spied in things evil. The devotion of a woman who had beauty and some attributes of the lady was to Paine a continual surprise, profoundly flattering. His attachment to her, such as it was or could be, had been absolute for some years, though it was only a month ago that he had gone to live with her. Paine went on arguing against goodness in sheer perversity of will and intellect.

Happily, for the time being, he was now conciliated.

He affectionately watched a glass of beer poured out for Darbyshire—who, looking rather as if he had fought with wild beasts, said fervently to Mrs Templeton, "Thanks; you've saved my life." Enoch's request for a drink of water gave him, if anything, a heightened sense of benignity. With his back against the mantel-shelf, and thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, he was rising to a fine conception of the rôle of good fairy about to be played by him. He presently proposed to make a speech on modest merit. But, the supper being ready, he cleverly tipped forward, first to a chair back and then to the table's edge, and so slipped into his seat.

"Come along, boys," was his jovial invitation. "She's dyin' to know my little secret, an' she won't let you think so. Should we tell it her?"

"Certainly," Darbyshire voted.

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"Rather a shock, y'know. Dangerous," he said playfully. "Look at her! She's afraid already."

"Not at all, dear boy: knows it's good luck."

Paine frowned, to indicate that he was joking. "What should y'say," he ogled, "if I found a nice boardin'-school for the youngsters an' took you to London f'r a month? Now!—now don't get excited." There had been just a quiver of the limpid violet eyes. "An' bought you," he slowly continued, "some new frocks, an' a pretty hat, an' a tailor-made costume?"

She looked at the others, flushing, and asked if they had been paid for a big shorthand note.

"No," said Paine, ecstatically.

"They've never put your salary up, Fred?"

"Haw! haw!" he laughed; and in the midst of her bewilderment he proudly announced the facts. "Aunt Sarah's extinct, an' she's left me five thou'."

"Oh! Fred," cried the girl, and instantly got up, threw her arms about him, and kissed him on the forehead. "Now you'll be free of that horrid office. Oh, but you mustn't spend it, dear. . . Where is it? Have you—oh, what a piece of luck! Is it true? I can't believe it."

She looked round for confirmation, and kissed him again, time after time. When she recovered herself there were tears in her eyes.

Paine chaffed her through the supper in his best manner; and she smiled under the bullying push and tug of it.

But as the two young journalists walked home, Enoch was thinking of the hopeless case in which he stood with Barbara, despite his virtue. Besides, the widow had two children, whom it appeared no virtue in Paine to adopt. To Darbyshire's open-eyed amusement he began to rail against Paine bitterly, and was not to be brought to a better frame of mind by any play of persiflage.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SWAY OF BLAND CONVENTION

WITH respect to the motions of instinct in Enoch Watson, it will be seen that his way with evildoers was to loathe alike offences and offenders. That may be imputed to a defective training, as well as to something less than godlike in the natural man. But he was young. We learn with years to make allowances.

Enoch Watson also lacked the habit of active kindness in free association with his fellow-men—a habit healthier than the critical moral sense fostered apart from it. He was in the sad case common to prigs and dainty ladies, whom contact with the world in that condition of mind excites to a horror of the species. It is an ancient error—the endeavour to *be good* standing for a simple unjudging charity in doing good—and it confounds both the Churchman and the unphilosophical theorist. They look at evil through high-power lenses, see it monstrous grim and large, and in different ways are much distraught by its presence in the visible world.

A conventional acceptance of it is by comparison much more charitable. But that is a salt without savour.

In respect of the sway conventions have upon all of us, a surprise awaited our novice. Some days later there was general talk of a presentation dinner to Paine, as not only a proper thing in the circumstances, but an occasion of high enthusiasm. True, this enthusiasm was not for Paine alone; it was partly for the jollifica-

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tion. No man of any importance had left the Merchanton press for five years past, and with one accord Paine's colleagues and the staffs of opposition journals were ready to eat and drink in his honour and to sing "For he's a jolly good fellow." But it seemed in some degree to be a genuine feeling for Paine. Men kept saying that he was "a good sort"; and I believe this used to mean among reporters a man who did not "sneak a bulge" upon a slow competitor, knew how to work with his colleagues, and showed himself a Bohemian indeed in whom there was no "side"; modest virtues, yet beneficent, for they enabled a man's fellows to rejoice with him over a windfall.

When, in the service of a rival paper, you turned up late at a meeting, Paine was ready to let you see his copy; it appeared, indeed, that there were some defaulters for whom he had smuggled out proofs from the *Chronicle* office when they had not "shown up" at all. As for his boozing, that was done after work. Youngsters testified that he never snubbed them, and in the course of saying so compared him scornfully with Sowerbutts and others. They also pronounced that nobody could write descriptive like him. When the Town Hall was on fire (a frightful rush) he stood as cool as anything on the other side of the street, writing it up on his hand; and his stuff was fine!—fine! And then for sarcasm! Remember the article on fancy hair-dressing when some "tonsorial artists" from London gave a public exhibition? Killing, it was. And *The Yorkshire Bite*, it had never been the same since he ceased to edit it. In sums of a sovereign, ten shillings, five shillings and half-a-crown, the ill-paid journalists of Merchanton made up a purse of eight pounds five shillings to buy him a travelling-bag and a gold pencil-case; and Enoch subscribed five shillings, trying to

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think that he was pleased to do so. He had had some occasion to mistrust his own judgment.

He did not trust it any the more in conforming to a general movement ; but to conform was easiest.

Darbyshire told him that Old Smith would preside at the dinner. Old Smith was Mr Alderman Smith. He had doubtless been asked to take the chair in view of his ornamental value ; but Enoch was surprised to see the satisfaction his consent to do so gave, because it had been common to speak of Old Smith (who was hardly more than middle-aged, by the way) as a skinflint, an ass of a parson, and no journalist. The incorporation of the journalistic body by Royal Charter ten years later was very desirable ; for one of its objects, perhaps indirectly aimed at, was to bind the working journalist more loyally to his moneyed patron, the owner of newspapers ; and another object, more attractive, was to keep that officer sensible of his honourable duties. The charter, and the new spirit that led to its procurement, have had some effect, moreover. I picture a phase of second-rate journalism in the eighties. They have together brought into the calling a better class of men, and the rest may follow.

Paine's going was delayed. He had neither paid out to Ireton a month's salary nor withdrawn himself at once without doing so. Perhaps the wrench would have been too sharp. At any rate he consented to tide the paper over the shallows caused by his retirement, and did a month's unnecessary work, daily rewarded by his colleagues' admiration.

Enoch had no more of his gibes, and forgot to be envious. He even dressed for the dinner in a pleasant mood of expectancy.

Convention had a raw recruit in him, donning a uniform with the secret little swell of elation that

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uniforms inspire; Darbyshire had persuaded him to order his first dress suit for this occasion. Thus he prepared to enjoy himself in doing honour to the man he most disliked in the world. There had been twinges, spasms even; at the first mention of presentation and dinner he had kicked with boyish indignation, grown angry at Macdonald for laughing, called it an outrage on ordinary morals, and vowed that he, for one, wouldn't be a hypocrite; yet such is social use and wont that this conscientious tiro, who had held his own against home influence and the powers of darkness, grew first uncertain, then ashamed, and finally complacent, in face only of a genial expectation that he would conform. The sufficient reasons for doing so he had not discovered. Somebody—perhaps Darbyshire—said the honour was done to the journalist, not to the man, and that made away with his last scruple; nor did he chance to take it as an admission that smart journalism is less difficult than noble living and may have a standard less admirable. He found out how to dress himself, and saw in the mirror the fine effect of a large shirt front. And as he entered the Blue Boar, pluming himself, Mr Enoch Watson bethought him of Hamlet's words to Polonius about the players:—

“Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping? Use them after your own honour and dignity: the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.”

After that he was hardly nervous in his new trappings. Darbyshire, himself resplendent, viewed him with sheer delight.

“Oh, catch me, somebody!” he cried. “Why wasn't I born a gyrl?”

They sat together, and this at the cross table—Enoch as a sub-editor, albeit the youngest one. Enoch

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had an end seat, looking along at all the bigger men. The only absentees were Ireton and Penny, it seemed. On the alderman's right was Paine, upon his left Macdonald; beyond Paine the editor and sub-editor of an opposition sheet; next to Macdonald a florid borough councillor whom Paine was friendly with. By contrast with this man's complexion the leader-writer's pallor looked etherial; not so his unkempt hair, for the councillor's hair was well pomatumed. There were none but dress suits above the salt, though very few below it; and a last small misgiving of Enoch's vanished as he noted this without compassion. He had, however, an awkward moment when Jack proposed that they should share a bottle of wine "to christen the togs," for the suggestion was diffidently made, and he supposed that in refusing it he would put his friend to greater expense; but Darbyshire joined with Heap, who sat between him and the borough councillor.

At once the merriment began to kindle. The good dinner, or Darbyshire's wit, made Heap another man. His working face of gloom was miraculously transfigured; he seemed to look on life like a man who had not despaired, as all imagined of him, but had grimly husbanded his courage; and now he was not at all taciturn. He told some stories, and even told them well. When he understood that Jack was calling the wine "the Paine-killer," after a patent medicine of the time, his crack of a laugh diverted all the room. Darbyshire filled his glass afresh and spoke in praise of Burgundy. He said that it cured corns, warts and bunions, and was a certain remedy for bald heads; it had been patronised by Royalty, and all children liked it; dose, one tablespoonful every two minutes. He undertook to time Heap's medicine. "Old man," he would say confidentially, "you're forgetting it, you

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know;" or "Bless my soul! Missed one dose," and would hastily fill the glass again; or merely nudge him, with a look of veiled reproof. Men looked over at their corner, taking the cue from them, and raised their glasses, beaming. It became embarrassing. "The dose, old man, the strict dose," said Darbyshire. "Keep your eye on your plate. You can't take physic with the whole hospital." Enoch took the advice to himself, drinking gingerbeer.

Then the toasts came on. The chairman had nothing to say for the Queen, although that toast was honoured (she was understood somehow to have alighted Mr Gladstone); but of Paine, the guest of the evening, he spoke so highly that he might be thought to have hesitated between paying £3, 15s. a week for his services and offering him a partnership. The artificial terms that Mr Smith preserved with his staff precisely fitted him to say such things as this occasion merited.

He was a tall and sparely-built man with a yellow skin, a too metallic voice for the pulpit, and a keenly ranging eye; and he rose with evident pleasure and domination. They were met, he said amid a solemn silence, for the purpose of testifying their high sense of admiration and esteem for a colleague who had set an example of tireless industry and devotion to all ranks of their laborious and responsible profession.

A deferential murmur of applause encouraged him; and to hear the profession spoken of so handsomely was to feel the solemnity deepen.

Mr Paine, he said, and raised his voice, had by the blessing of Providence inherited a fortune which, as he (Mr Smith) was informed, enabled him to choose his path in life without anxiety; and, to the long regret of all of them, he had elected to quit a service which he was fitted by every gift of mind, and equipped by

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experience and ripened habit, to adorn. (Emphatic applause, hammered on the clattering tables.) Their regret was founded upon seven years of daily observation and companionship. (Cordial murmurs.) Mr Smith, with a briefer opportunity of knowing him, had observed the rightness of Mr Paine's mind in the service of the public, the sweetness of his manners, his discreet and very successful use of sarcasm—quite a special feature of Mr Paine's writing (hear, hear!)—his hatred of shams, his zeal for social reform, his personal integrity. Depend upon it, gentlemen, the best traditions of an ancient and honourable craft relied for their preservation upon the continuance of qualities like these in its votaries. (Enthusiasm.)

Clearly Mr Smith liked his duty. But it was permissible to wonder how far this eulogy agreed with Paine's conception of himself.

Thinking to do a little good, Mr Smith said next that the ideals of the journalist were the ideals of the gentleman; and, defining them, he not only struck an unfortunate vein of severe irony with respect to Paine—which indeed might have passed for generosity—but avowed such a high opinion of journalists in general that every man in the room, being paid according to the quaintly humble scale of Merchanton and 1880, thought wistfully of salaries. He dwelt upon the fact that although their work was done anonymously they did it incorruptibly; and this, alas! reminded some responsible writers that, debarred as they were from signing the uncorrupted articles, they could not from Merchanton make their own value widely known in the market. He said that he was proud of a staff who on all occasions of pressure, such as the late elections had caused, worked together heartily for "the common success of the paper"; and he added that the example

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of Mr Paine as descriptive hand had fostered this *esprit du corps* in the reporting body. What banded them together was a pride of unselfish devotion, honourable alike to the profession and to themselves. (Applause.)

"Noble sentiment, Reverend Alderman," said Darbyshire aside, for Enoch's hearing. "The G.O.M. isn't in it."

It was inevitable, Mr Smith pursued with nice emphasis, that he should feel the loss of such a colleague keenly, as he, for his part, certainly felt the loss of a loyal servant. But they all rejoiced in his good fortune heartily (uproarious acclamation); and he was sure they wished him every happiness. He had always said (he said it now with a hardy kind of smirk, desiring, it would seem, to be indulged a personal opinion) that there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it (painful sensation, cries of "No," and one bold cry of "Shame!"); but he was bound to confess that Mr Paine's very sudden determination to abandon the dear old *Chronicle* had come with something of a shock to him.

Here, in an awkward pause, the one bold man said outright, "A good thing!" causing some to blush and some to titter. Enoch's hair stirred upon his sensitive head. But Mr Alderman Smith went on as if untouched to the end of his peroration.

When he sat down there was not much clapping of hands, and no hammering. These formalities were merged at once in a surly undertone of talk, in which men lifted eyebrows or affected stern composure. Talking affably with Paine before he called upon the next speaker, Mr Smith, it is true, took no account of this. They were asking, however, why a fool like him was allowed to speak at all; and some said that the *Chronicle*

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men were a grovelling set anyhow. Heavens! The cheek of him! As for Darbyshire, he had shed upon Enoch a side-glance; and his remark when the speech ended was to the effect that, by Paine's desertion of him, Old Smith had been "touched on the raw, my boy—trying to feel as if it didn't hurt."

Defiance added now to enthusiasm.

Macdonald, next upon his feet, sounded the first note of it. With the cheerful light in his eye that meant mischief, he drily observed that, in this comparison of human beings with fishes, there lurked a possible fallacy. He took it that the chairman was figuring himself as a fisherman, and the rest of them as herring.

Mr Smith cried, "Oh! Why herring? Why not turbot, Macdonald?"

Pursued Macdonald: "Nothing really turns upon the kind of fish you had in mind, Mr Chairman. For myself, like a certain English monarch, I think the herring is a rather finely-flavoured fish." General agreement. "But my point is this: You will see, upon reflection, that the fallacy may come of regarding other men as fish in the sea while still thinking of oneself as a human being." Rude applause here and there, which compelled Macdonald to cry "No, no," raising his hand. "No, it is this: So far as we know, there is no material difference between herrings except as to sex and size; but really, sir, in the human being we are aware of great variety."

Here, when the applause should have come, there was none, but only a movement of expectation. Macdonald paused, took a pinch of snuff, and coughed, as his habit was to do. You might perceive a green glitter of nervousness in the chairman's eye, but he was leaning back at his ease with a smile.

"In order to make the simile satisfactory," Macdonald

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went on, "we shall have to regard you not as a human fisherman, but as a larger kind of predatory fish, Mr Chairman." Disrespectful tittering. "The Lord God also created great whales."

After a pause, loud and long jubilation!—the chairman much diverted, so that he and Paine laughed in each other's ears and had some private joke upon it.

"I am willing to believe that the whale consumes herring without distinguishing a particular flavour in each—and therefore you are not like a whale;—but there is a sufficient reason for that in the fact that all herring have, as I suppose, nearly the same flavour—while alive. Nevertheless, I admire the enterprise of the individual herring who gets away." Whereat there was more laughter, amid a grateful cry of cheering.

In praise of Paine, Macdonald measured his words; and he was content, for the rest, to suggest a number of pleasant ways in which a man might live upon the interest on five thousand pounds. Doubtless, Mr Paine had a little plan of his own, finer than any of those he had named, and precisely calculated to show the stuff he was made of. But their conviction was that it could not fail of increasing his pleasure in this wealth to find them all sincerely glad that he had come in for it, and hopeful that he would thrive upon it.

The speech was discreet, because humorous; but every speaker who came after, whether he rose to the major toast, to "The Art and Craft of Journalism," to "The Mayor and Corporation," or to "The Chairman," thought it necessary to tell Mr Smith that Paine was a nonpareil; and the diners sang "For he's a jolly good fellow" three times over, with a makeweight fragment of a fourth time. Paine, in acknowledgment, spoke with a good deal less than his natural ease, and even left alone Macdonald.

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As he watched and listened, Enoch Watson had an odd sense of unreality in the scene itself. In a smoky atmosphere and a glitter of strong lights, the faces of men whom he knew and did not know wore all sorts of expressions with which he was not in sympathy, and confused him as faces do in some dreams. The face of Paine shone pale. He had an unaccustomed flower in his coat, and there was something flat in his voice; Enoch lost the sense of what he was saying while he considered him with attention. At length his eyes, wandering, fell upon a bald waiter unoccupied, with the look of a man who bears up cheerlessly against the want of sleep, and Enoch emerged from his brown study. The dinner had begun to bore him; he resented all subsequent eulogy.

Yet Darbyshire easily constrained him to join a small party assembling in the bar after hours. More than ever out of his element there, he had either to look like a kill-joy or to affect the gay Bohemian; and afterwards it appeared to him that he had successfully disguised himself.

At three o'clock, to the embarrassment of a young policeman, he and four others sang "Poor Old Jeff" in the street. That was by way of a dirge over Heap, about to be taken home in a crowded cab by six admirers hardly abler than himself; and it had a kind of propriety. But every man of the carousers was known to that unhappy constable; and he had not only to wink at a breach of law, but to stand by and see authority flouted by a noisy crew that bade him sing the bass part and beat the time at him. Enoch quailed beneath his critical eye while he sang, and had a vision of being haled before Mr Alderman Smith on Monday morning. But, the cabman starting promptly, they desisted half-way through a second verse.

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Darbyshire and he went home alone, after shaking hands with the shining Paine very seriously; and Jack opined that the dinner had been a great success—the best farewell dinner he remembered—a *dénouement*, dear boy. His friend was past disputing that. The stupefaction of debauchery had descended even upon him, and he went to bed half-an-hour later without so much as noticing the sunny day.

He awoke from a dream of Sheepton, his quiet mother baking bread in the house alone.

CHAPTER XXIV

MUSIC AND A RIFT IN THE LUTE

By this time Barbara's folly and his own had brought them to the verge of disaster, though they were not to pass it.

He did not now idealise, he languished merely. She had no perception of a vital change in him such as this implied; but, in fact, she had let him see that they were creatures of one flesh, and he did not reproach himself upon the loss of reverence. True, he never called disaster by a pleasant name, desiring it. The nearness of it, his weakened power of resistance, had begun indeed to frighten him; sometimes he stood in the street, or came awake in his bed, with the sensations of a man in a ship who looks into the whirlpool that is presently to swallow up him and his dearest. But, even as he gazed, horror gave place to a fascination profoundly sweet; he heard the sirens singing.

Barbara trusted him at length too well to be similarly troubled; but so much trust was apt to make her sometimes wistful, and when she was left alone the recurrent question was, "Is it wrong? Isn't it sin?"—worried by which she read her Bible as a kind of mechanical distraction, and hugged it to her breast afterwards. It never occurred to Barbara to question her aversion from the path that Nature's kindly impulse pointed, her very moderation of false indulgence, her nice management. Prudence was virtue, as she understood it; mere prudence constituted in her mind the whole law—unless to wish for love was wicked in itself, as she so dreaded.

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But leave her such defences as she had and used against misfortune. Certain it is that her brave and busy spirit never dwelt too long with one preoccupation. She threw off perplexity as lightly as a child runs out to play, and felt it sensible to do so.

Happily for the issue of this entanglement, if not for time to come, their jarring temperaments made a rift in the siren lute.

Barbara's instinct for safety in diversions was the cause. She took him out into the town, and there her large acquaintance was apt to fret his sense of imperfect possession. That he could be extravagantly jealous has been seen ; and he had many more than Mr Prince Varley to vex him, if not to alarm his poor opinion of her generalship. Her complaisance in stopping to chat with all and sundry provoked him as it had never done in the beginning of their friendship, though now he knew that it was guileless. He might have perceived that it was something more. Drawn to him now in a sense alarming to her religion, and to her wish to be free, the more she felt allured by one the more she had to assure herself of honesty and strength by showing a gay and innocent face to all.

His pride was continually galled. She saw it, and nothing else displeased her in him ; she took it as unkind, as a doubt which he ought not to feel in face of all the proofs she gave him of a preference more than sisterly. He was unreasonable too ; he would not stay beside her, yet when she rejoined him he had a face of stone. Enoch's view of his behaviour was too disagreeable to his self-respect to be stated, either in self-accusation or in defence. He walked on when she stopped, because he could not endure to see the eyes of other men devouring her ; once or twice only had she been too quick for such evasion, and introduced them to him.

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He left her, and added anger to white jealousy because she kept him waiting: surely his being there ought to have furnished her with a pretext for getting quickly away! But, whatever was upon his tongue, she prevented utterance by a gush of frank apology and explanation; and to see her animated was fuel to the fire. She would have been wiser to say nothing. Her tact failed in dealing with a strongly-centered nature that she did not understand and had begun to fear.

At length she gave him an opening. Vexed at a stupid fellow who had not been easy to dismiss, she expressed annoyance.

"I don't see why you should stop in the street at all," said Enoch, intending to discuss it calmly.

"Oh, well, he sometimes plays my accompaniments for me," she answered lightly. "I was asking him about summer engagements." Which was a typical case.

"But what good can it do?" he urged. "I never hear of these people helping you. It lets you down, I think."

"Oh, I must keep in with them," said she, "or I should never hear of things. Besides, I shouldn't like them to think me proud, Con."

The next time he protested she had kept him waiting too long—a full quarter of an hour indeed—and the chat, observed from a little distance, had seemed to Enoch to be highly agreeable. He was furious; at first he could not trust himself to speak, but walked on as soon as she joined him. Barbara made haste as usual to appease him, saying pleasantly,—

"That's Mr Appleyard, the new conductor. Why didn't you stop, dear? You ought to know Mr Appleyard, for the paper."

He made no reply.

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"He's been trying to get me an engagement at Scarborough. He asked me who you were. I don't see why I shouldn't get seaside engagements like other people—do you? I mean I might as well be keeping my pupils on through the vacation if not."

"Oh, I'm much obliged to him," said Enoch.

Barbara ventured nothing more, but presently drew him aside to look at a window. "Isn't that a pretty hat?" she wished to know. "I'm sure I could wear that."

"Perhaps," said Enoch then, "if he sees it, Mr Appleyard may buy it for you."

She gave his arm a little petulant shake and resumed the walk. Even in his rage the lad was astonished that she took a churlish speech so quietly; but her chatting winsomely had been too much for self-control. He flew to the other extreme of abnegation, saying, "Shall I leave you to him if we meet again? I'd rather do so than wait till he's done with you, really."

"Now you're unreasonable," Barbara said decisively. "I'm sure it wasn't more than five minutes. And it isn't a bit of good talking like that, Con, for I sha'n't cut him."

"Then I've nothing to complain of."

"I do think we'd better talk of something else," said Barbara.

The words came to his ear as if she were smiling; and, bewildered, he glanced at her face. She had moved to a tall young fellow who was bearing down upon them joyfully; she made a pause as he came up, and Enoch, ignoring a quick pressure upon his arm, left her forthwith, and this time did not wait.

He was horribly afraid of what the consequence might be, and did his work that night in a cold dismay, with trembling fingers. By the time it was finished he

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had grown light-headed. Staying late with Macdonald and Penny, he entered with extraordinary spirit into a game of three-handed catches with letter-weights, and, chancing to break a window, laughed at this excellent mishap with intervals till bedtime. Then, in his privacy between the blankets, the unpurposed hero quite forgot his wounded dignity, and cried himself to sleep like an over-sentimental girl.

When he awoke and went over the quarrel, he was sure that he had been in the right ; and instead of going to see Barbara he took a desperate long walk, recovered a grim sense of manly independence, and turned into the office for tea. Ireton, who had had to send for a glazier, scowled at him and gravely said, "That window will cost somebody four and ninepence, young man ; and let there be no more skylarking."

"I broke it," Enoch faced him. "Will you have the money now ?"

"I will," said the managing editor.

"There it is !" With a flaming face he threw down a five-shilling piece. "And please not to speak to me like that again. I can't stand it."

The staff were aghast, expecting to see him "sacked" then and there. But Ireton admired his work, and in the awful silence he was heard to chuckle grimly. "Hear the young cockerel crow," he said.

A small office-boy put his head in at the door at that instant. "Mr Watson," he piped, "a lady downstairs wants to see you, sir."

"Oho !" cried Penny, as if that explained everything. "Be off with you ! Macdonald and I go shares, you know."

"What ! In the lady ?" said somebody ; and Enoch hurried to the stair, endeavouring vainly to collect his thoughts. For one thing, he could not conceive that

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Barbara should make so bold as to call for him at a place of business.

She waited within the glass doors at the foot of the staircase. He descended quickly, his head in a whirl, and behold ! she held out her hand with no difference of manner except a shade of pretty anxiety. "You're not vexed that I've called ?" she questioned. "You shouldn't have run away like that, Con ; I wasn't a minute with him, and then you were gone. Why didn't you come this afternoon ?"

He was not only abashed by her simple way of smoothing matters, but felt some disposition to cry again. "I thought you were tired of me," he got out.

"Oh, silly boy !" She put up a comic mouth, and he felt her hand come softly about his waist. "Oo know velly well I couldn't do without oo." And, adjusting his tie with the other hand, she gave him a tiny hug.

He covered her glove with kisses.

"You'll come to-morrow, then ?"

"Come ! Oh, my dear, you're far too kind to me," he cried out.

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye — sweetheart." And he ran upstairs absurdly smiling, to be chaffed without minding it. Ireton in particular enjoyed his simpering.

As for Barbara, she went away content. She had been afraid that he would not see how unkind and foolish he was, to be so touchy. Her spirits were consequently light ; she gave a penny to the cripple who had once fleered at her, and who was always an ugly recollection. Buying some dainties for supper she said to herself, happily, that Enoch was a good boy, a treasure ; she was getting very fond of him. Of course he did not understand.

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Enoch, on his part, was thinking that at least he had now asserted himself.

When she continued the practice that offended him, he received her multiplied excuses with a profound chagrin. He said no more about it ; but from that time his affection was flawed. He did not realise this, because she filled his thoughts as much as ever. It was afterwards, indeed, that he stole a precious kiss I have not told of ; but there were moods in which he called himself her lackey.

In the month of July Barbara got an engagement to play for a week at Blackpool, and was so well pleased with it that, in the rush of making ready for her journey, she unwarily let him fancy that the separation did not trouble her much.

But at the railway station she wore a sober face, made him promise to write to her daily, and with moist eyes threw him a kiss as the train started. He blamed his own selfishness then, and went away happy. Her first letter, too (it began "My dear Brother Con," and ended "with best love to my kind brother"), gave him a singular delight, though most of it was commonplace—as, that she had found good rooms, and the weather was glorious, the air of Blackpool bracing. Endearments have an extraordinary value when they are first put upon paper for hungry eyes. He took out the letter a dozen times that day, and fancied that the paper, as he kissed it, had a faint odour of her hand. She wished he could be with her, and he took this to mean that she was longing for his company.

Enoch spent the afternoon in pouring out his heart to her ; he had as much more to say the next afternoon ; no literary exercise had ever been so easy to him, so ingenuously delightful ; but on the third day there came no reply to his first effusion. It is certain that Barbara trusted his affection too fearlessly.

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He began to write again directly after breakfast, sitting with his knees pressed together and nipping the pen. His conjecture was that she had missed a post, not knowing the Blackpool times of collection; but the shock of disappointment being still upon him, he could not order his thoughts—until, by chance, he began "If I should lose you," and then his writing prospered. But about four o'clock he saw the postman pass his window, and sickened with dismay. The coldness that crept about his heart and set his limbs trembling was as dire as if he had lost her indeed. Presently he closed and sealed the letter, realising that he would have to wait for an explanation.

At the office he found on his desk before tea a telegram, and tore open the red envelope in a fright. The telegram read simply:—

"Kind letters received. Will write. Great success with public.—BARBARA."

He was dazed. It had seemed to his amorous egotism that what he wrote must affect her like his very presence; by word of mouth he had never been able to tell his love, but with the pen he knew that he had been eloquent. He had committed to much paper, proud of the form they took, his purest thoughts of her. He had made a plenary confession, worshipped her utterly, acknowledged his own unworthiness, praised her unfailing goodness, long-suffering and loving-kindness. Was it possible that this had hardly moved her?

But as he had not in all his life despatched a private telegram, he was a little comforted by thinking hers a mark of solicitude at least.

He understood that she could not bare her heart for the eyes of the counter clerks, but wished him not to

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be uneasy. At table he saw Macdonald scanning his face more than once, and flushed although the glance was kindly. He was not aware that during the meal he never spoke, or gave any sign that he heard the others talking.

He slipped downstairs next morning after four hours' sleep to see the promised letter. It was not on the mantelpiece, and the landlady said the postman had not called. After asking the time of the next delivery, he said he would get some more sleep, she need not make breakfast yet; and climbing the stair with a labouring breast he got to the bed and threw himself down on it, smothering his face. Passion for an hour was very like despair with him. The fact looked merciless, she did not love him; and when, in the depth of misery, he recalled their intimate moments, to him sacred and rapturous, it was to accumulate the monstrous proofs. Assuaged at length by so much weeping, his grief permitted him to look about again; he felt weak and hungry; and, washing his face, he waited until his glass showed him that he might go down to breakfast. But he had not the heart for another letter; he watched the clock, and then the window, until four; and his anxiety as the hour drew near was insufferable.

When the postman passed again he felt for a moment stunned, and afterwards he was very cold; but he sat down with a lucid mind to take account of his perdition.

He did not impute it to the true cause—Barbara's unromantic nature and busy absorption in what went on immediately about her; but he did suppose that his case was hopeless, and did relinquish her in thought, as completely as if she had refused to see him again. His ugly fancy was that she had found someone else to play with; and it did not affect him feverishly, but rallied

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self-regard, so that he went down to work almost calm, with the iron in his soul. Walking home in the morning Enoch experienced a great fatigue ; and he slept both heavily and late.

The day was Friday. He found a letter on his breakfast-table, and opened it without haste, supposing himself the master of his fate. It ran thus :—

“MY DEAR BROTHER CON,—I ought to have written ere this, but have not found time, 'tis so difficult here to be private. Your dear letters received ; I was glad to have them ; will say more when we meet. I have had a success with the public here, judging by the encores and notices (in Manchester papers. Did you see them ?). I need not say how pleased I am to be getting on so well, and the attention I receive is also very gratifying. On Tuesday the manager of the Winter Gardens and his wife asked me to drive with them ; it was a splendid drive along the coast. The next day I had a carriage and pair offered to myself, the same that was lent to them, by their friend. The manager said I was to accept the use of it, which I did, and took out two other members of the company (married). We went to several places, driving for five hours ; it was grand, the air is so fine and the sea superb. So you see I have enjoyed myself, and should have liked another week here, but they are booked up, so am coming home Saturday night (train leaves here, I think, eleven fifteen). Hope to see my dear brother on Sunday as usual.—With best love from your loving sister,

BARBARA WEST.”

Will it be forgiven him that by this bright letter he

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was further mortified? The tone of it confessed, he thought, a cheerful apathy. Nevertheless the blood ran warmer in his veins as he finished reading. He understood that she had been faithful, and not quite indifferent.

After a long re-perusal of the letter he was impatient to see her. It might have come from another hand in her name, the style was so unlike her speech and looks. The truth is, he was a little hurt that she had been so happy without him, and in pardoning this he longed to be happy with her. Like a weathercock in March, he had swung clean about "unbeknown."

On Saturday he was happy in advance. Happiness kept a tinkle sounding in his heart like the little silver bell at mass; he was resolved to meet her train. At such an hour as three or four o'clock in the morning she would be surprised to see him, and he foresaw—delicious prospect!—that he should ride with her home in a cab.

At length the train, appearing in a wan vista of morning mist, drew heavily in to the empty station, and a platform began to fill with wan excursionists. Enoch hurried past them to the single guard's van, not seeing Barbara but sure that he would find her there in quest of her trunk. He was almost too happy to breathe: the secret silver bell ran on like a rill. Should he catch her in his arms? It was what he boldly determined to do—and he knew that she would like it.

Barbara came to the luggage without seeing him and buttonholed the guard. There was a jostling crowd and a litter. By the time Enoch got round to her a porter had identified her by the labelled trunk and was giving her a big bouquet, with some explanation to which she listened eagerly.

He reached her in time to prevent this porter from going for a cab; he had himself bespoken one. Then,

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as well as he could afterwards remember, he said, "Good-morning, Miss West," looking at her from out of the jostle with a nervous kind of smile. The final cause of this absurd behaviour was, however, her own embarrassment. He saw it not only in the first blink of her eyes, but in the well-known readiness with which she began to talk as soon as he turned from the man to take her violin-case.

She had flushed, but she said, "Con, how you startled me! Do you say you've got a cab? Oh, that was velly thoughtful; I *am* so tired, dear." And with this they moved away together. "Isn't this a nice bouquet that Mr Varley has sent me? I've travelled with such disagreeable people, quarrelling all the way: oh, miserable! I don't know how such people live. How good of you to come and meet me!"

He let her bid him good-night as she got into the cab. She was concerned to see how white he looked; but, as he kept a cheerful face, she would not even to herself confess the knowledge that emotion was the cause. He had to assure her that he was well.

CHAPTER XXV

TÂTONNEMENT AMICAL

BARBARA must have been yet more concerned had she known that Enoch, on the way to see her next day, suddenly let his purpose go and took a walk in Alder Park. As it was, she nursed the absurd notion of some illness, against a defection that quickened all her sympathies and wits.

His heart had positively and quite suddenly failed him. He wanted to know how Varley had been informed of the time of her return, and how much affection she had kept for Enoch Watson. With the misgiving that she would only baffle him, his mind, so long racked by one preoccupation, took a distaste for torture; and he drifted with the stream of Sunday loungers. The sense of pleasurable ease then was extraordinary to him.

In the park he lighted on Macdonald and his wife. Mrs Macdonald he had not seen before, and he instantly admired her. With a clear, direct look from grey eyes she smiled radiantly in giving her hand. "So *you* are the rogue," she cried, "who has stolen half my husband's affection; he talks of nobody else, and I have been jealous of you."

"Don't you go for to believe her!" said Macdonald. "This is the way she flatters me too."

"But it's true," she said, her eyes opening wider, "and I've wanted to see you ever so. I know all about the time you help him to waste in a morning—and the money in broken windows—oh, yes, and the great scene with that absurd Mr Ireton. Won't you sit down with

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us? My husband said you were shy! Do you know, I believe he thought that if we met I should scold you, he comes home so late. But I shall scold *him* for teaching others dissipation."

Nobody would have said that Mrs Macdonald herself was shy. She stood upright like a man, and spoke and laughed without a trace of affectation, her voice a little noisy even. Shy she was, but nowise lacking in moral courage. Enoch, without understanding this, was struck only by the sheer honesty of her carriage. It put him at ease. This it was that he fell in love with—the idea of her trustworthiness, the strength of a woman; he felt it in the quick grasp of her hand, heard it ring in her speech, and saw it in her pose, in the confident bantering looks she flung at Macdonald, in the brightness of her skin even—for, if her face had no great beauty of line, the complexion was that of a tomboy. He took her to be about thirty years of age.

When she threatened to scold her husband, Macdonald cracked off with a merry laugh. "I've taught you to go to bed, at all events," he said.

"Oh, this horrid journalism!" he cried, and turned again to Enoch (she was sitting between them). "Never get married, Mr Watson, unless you are clear of the morning papers. It's a tragedy."

"It is, my dear," drily Macdonald agreed.

"Why, we didn't have a honeymoon even. James is married to his desk more completely than to me—and I, poor soul, pretending not to mind it, because he writes noble leaders. . . . Yes, I used to wait up half the night for him, and get so nervous that I had to stand on the doorstep. Ugh! Those winter nights! I wonder they weren't the death of me."

"Especially the first of 'em," said Macdonald.

"Oh, the first! Yes, indeed, the first. My wedding

Barbara West

day. What do you suppose your admirable colleague did for his precious bride? He brought me home to a house without coal in the cellar; and it was Christmas Eve, if you please, a hard frost! Fires lighted by the washerwoman burning cheerfully, oh, quite propitiously; and after tea, when he had gone down to the office, didn't I just get a shock like Old Mother Hubbard."

The guilty husband took up the tale. "You see, I had been buying coal by the sack, and lost count, so to speak. But mark this, Mr Watson: she scraped a small handful out of the coal-house corners and kept it till I came home at three a.m.; and I found my wife shivering at the garden gate. I had talked hopefully of coming at two, and she naturally thought I'd been garrotted."

"So now he comes at five or six, and sees to the fire every morning."

To have chanced upon the company of this couple, with their breezy rough-and-tumble chaff, gave Enoch the sensation of turning out into a playground. They laughed, it is true, more heartily than he, but this was because he could not always tell how much was joke and how much earnest in their discourse. What delighted him was to see Macdonald so well mated. Afterwards he thought of Shakespeare's line about the marriage of true minds, and doubted how it would have been in his own case with Barbara.

They took him away to tea, and he was further reassured to find the leader-writer living in a house even smaller than he or Barbara lodged in. They had apparently no servant, for it was a latch-key that admitted them and Mrs Macdonald who made the tea. Choice, he supposed, had more to do with this than narrow means had, and it fitted in with all the leader-writer's talk against vulgar show; but, in any case, Macdonald explained that his wife was a schoolmistress—they had

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no children of their own and she liked to go on teaching.

This pair of brain workers lived in a street where the other houses were tenanted by the better sort of mill hands. In the Yorkshire woollen trade, a family in which the father is an overlooker and the wife or the daughter can weave may command an income of three or four pounds a week. Macdonald and his wife earned, if you would know, about six pounds ten shillings—respectively two hundred and sixty pounds and seventy-five pounds a year; but they both had parents to maintain, and they made a point of spending at least twenty pounds every summer on an educational pleasure trip; so that when they had put away a small sum for insurance, and paid their way, but little remained against old age or crippling accident. So much for two didactic professions.

Mrs Macdonald set a table while her husband talked. "Come, please!" she cried presently, and they found the meal spread in what is called by Yorkshire folk the living-room. "I'm giving you tea in the kitchen," she said; "it saves trouble, and," turning to Enoch, "I'm sure you won't mind."

He laughed. "This is the first glint of home I've had since leaving Sheepton."

"Some men profess to like the kitchen."

"I do like it. The kitchen to me is the best place in the house."

"Perhaps they brought you up too much to 'behave nicely' in the room."

"No; but I think the kitchen always *smells* good, and I like the sound of feet on a stone floor; and then the fireside. Whenever I read of 'hearth and home' I believe it's the kitchen hearth I think about."

Barbara West

She gave him an approving glance while pouring out the tea.

"Good," said Macdonald, pleased by his unaccustomed fluency of speech. "These are my sentiments. The idea of home itself is a plain idea. We are false to it if we live luxuriously."

"Here, hear!" she cried. "Why did you never say that before?"

"Because," he told her, "I was saying some other things first, my dear." Whereupon, after considering him a moment, she got up and boxed his ears.

"Isn't he sometimes too dreadful!" she complained.

Macdonald, who laughed under the chastisement like an incorrigible school-boy, protested that he had given the only possible answer. A man had to say some things first and others later, and the order could not very well be pre-determined.

"James Donald, do you know an interjection from a bull's foot?" said his wife.

"Not always."

"What! . . . You shall write me out the word 'Impudence' seven times."

When the talk turned upon marriage (the hostess leading), and they discussed what was meant by incompatibility of temper, an unconscious avowal trembled on Enoch's tongue, for he would have liked to state a case.

"The worst thing," Macdonald said, "is that one should have any large interest in which the other cannot share, isn't it?"

"Oh, I think there is a worse thing than that," she replied gravely—"that one should feel things more deeply than the other. Just think. If they quarrel the dull one goes on cheerfully while the other may be eating his heart out. Or perhaps it is a woman; I think it's a woman oftenest, because men have more distract-

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tions. Suppose even they don't quarrel, they can't agree; opinions are shaped so much by one's feelings. The keen one must find the other shallow, don't you think? and the dull one imagine that his partner is unreasonable. Then, of course, if either be strong-headed—" She shrugged, looking at her husband with pursed lips.

Macdonald's eye twinkled in response to the implication of her look. "Yes," he said, in the voice of resignation, "it's a discipline at best."

While he was enjoying the lad's uncertain laugh she touched his hand with a hot spoon, and a suspicion in Enoch's mind that the talk was directed at him vanished before that playfulness. It was nevertheless near the mark. Mrs Macdonald's gaiety sprang boldly, in fact, to seize an opportunity desired since the leader-writer had talked him over with her. These two were match-makers by persuasion. Macdonald, seeing him unhappy and guessing the cause from that slight incident at the office door, had chanced to speak of it to Darbyshire, and from him had got some idea of Barbara West. But his wife was talking breezy general principles, it seemed; had Enoch known of her peremptory interest in his case, how she had discussed it theoretically, said strong things about it practically, and egged Macdonald on to sound and counsel him, he would have been equally surprised and abashed. As it was, he listened with a high opinion of her wisdom, reserving the application of it.

"Of course it's a discipline!" she responded. "So's everything. How dare you look aught but cheerful under it? 'Twon't be doing you any good."

Macdonald's face said to him, "You see for yourself." His spoken words were, "It does me good daily—on condition that I'm free to deplore the fact."

Barbara West

She looked indignant consternation, and when he had done laughing, she said, "These are fine morals, at all events! Do you teach them at the *Chronicle* office?"

"No," said Enoch, "I think he teaches just the contrary. But I'm not going to get married."

"What, never?" *Pinafore* was new then.

"Well," said he, "hardly ever;" and this permitted them to laugh again. They were glad to hear the announcement. But when she asked him for a reason he, like Barbara, could not give one; and as Macdonald and he set off to work he was still regretting that he did not know her better. This proved to be his only sight of her.

"Your boy will do," she said to her husband after calling him back. "He's honest; and he must have more gumption than you thought."

"A puzzle!" he declared. "Quite unformed and very young, and never seeks advice, confound him!"

"That's his gumption, my dear," she answered. "Be off with you."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DEFINITE ISSUE INEVITABLE

It was not until Wednesday that he went to see her.

In going he felt his nerves strung to quiver with the expectation of undoing. All his life disciplined with "Thou shalt not" but little practised in "Thou shalt," he foresaw that to speak his mind would be difficult; she was not prepared for it. She had said that he was dear to her, that she put him before everybody; and she would be slow to convince of the rightness of his point of view, which, as he came to her door, seemed even to him quite unnaturally cruel and hard. He had to ask himself in some excitement what he should do if they quarrelled; and he found that he could not endure to part from her—this appeared the greatest calamity the world could hold, and frightened him—but she must be made to choose between this fellow Varley and him. When Mrs Shuttlewell admitted him, her careworn dusty face lighting up to see him again, he could not say "Good afternoon" to her. He stood in the passage with a mazy head and a distress of extreme cold upon him, while she shut the door and went before him to Barbara's room.

Barbara opened her own door however. She showed herself with just the old air of pleased composure, thanking the landlady as she gave him her delectable hand, to greet him with a rapid pressure of it like an appeal. Her eyes, visiting his own an instant with the poise of quick wings in sunlight, caressed him and fluttered.

Barbara West

He waited with no clear thought but of surprise at her honest look, which he had in some way been forgetting, and at his being there with such a purpose; and then in the room the nestling inflection of her voice—"Dear old Con," the words were, or some such, "now we're at home again, aren't we?"—this and her hand within his arm, and the faintly scented air he breathed beside her, searched him to the centre. He was not aware of the meaningless smile upon his lips, but only of a sick, necessitous craving after happiness.

He said simply "Ourselves!" and startled her with the hoarse voice that came and the look of strain on his face.

She hastened to lead him into what she thought a normal mood and course of talk. "Come see what I'm doing," she invited, and gently pushed him towards the bedroom. "Got all my old frocks out. You shall tell me which you like best." Chair backs and the bed were covered, a scene of intimate disorder new to him, and she began to overhaul these gowns at haphazard, telling him of the first appearance she made in this or that, lingering at one and with a negligent gesture throwing aside another, while her talk, at first vivaciously droll, fell away very soon in a bewilderment of choice and purpose: for some gowns needed altering to be in fashion, some were possibly too far gone for that, and she had an idea that she ought to get in a dressmaker but there was no machine in the house.

For a time Enoch forgot his errand. He forgot it in a humorous, tender sense of her simplicity. She confessed all sorts of little vanities that made him laugh with delight, and from time to time she required "his opinion" with a seriousness at once absurd and flattering. I beg you not to scorn his instability or her beguiling. This was, alas! to be the last of both.

The Definite Issue Inevitable

He was sharply summoned to play the man by seeing Mr Prince Varley at the garden gate.

As the bell rang he turned to Barbara and found her eyes alight and her cheeks a little flushed; she, too, had seen him, and she was hastily beginning to speak. "Mr Varley," she said, with a reassuring bend of the head. "I don't know why he's come, but now you shall be introduced to him."

He darted into the other room for his hat, and returning, brushed against her between the curtains. "This door," he said hurriedly; "unlock it!"

"Now, Con, oblige me, dear," she begged, opposing him.

He evaded her at the first word and again tried the handle. The door was fast. "The key—where is it?" He turned upon her. "Quick! he mustn't hear me in your bedroom!"

She spoke eagerly, a little pale with the flurry. "No, I want you to know each other," she explained. "Then you'll see. You are so suspicious, Con, I—"

He cried "Oh!" bursting with impatience of her governance; and besought her, "The key!"

"But, Con—" she pleaded.

"Don't keep me here again while you amuse him."

She listened, and Mrs Shuttlewell's step sounded in the passage. "Con, you must please me in this," she said rapidly. "We shall never understand each other till you—"

"Will you let me go?" he flashed out.

"You can't go; it's too late, Con," she whispered, for Varley's voice was audible in the same instant. "Come, quick!" She herself, to be ready for Mrs Shuttlewell, escaped into the sitting-room.

He did not follow. He stood alone a moment dumb-founded, and then he rushed toward the window; but

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the dressing-table and a wire blind were too much in the way for that retreat. He was trapped; and his anger blazed against Barbara, sweeping into one full flame of wrath the thwarted purposes of weeks. He heard nothing, for a time, of what was said beyond the curtains, and when the visitor's drawling laugh sounded he put his fingers to his ears. Barbara's cool overriding of his will, in this and everything else, hurt him like a humiliation, a sort of slight upon his manhood; he thought of Falstaff in the buck-basket. He was the angrier that he had himself to blame for it. It came of dallying with frocks, clean contrary to his purpose in coming again to see her.

He seized upon his self-control in a very fierce resolve to have done with such contemptible shilly-shally and show her that she had not to deal with a boy; and he uncovered his ears.

Barbara was saying, in a sharp tone of something like alarm, "Indeed I sha'n't! . . . I think you forget yourself, Mr Varley."

"Don't say that, my dear," her visitor pleaded after a pause, and his voice was thicker than usual. "Come, now, Barbara, what's the harm? You're an awfully nice girl, and we've been very good friends so far."

It was scarcely a jealous emotion that steadied Enoch Watson while it set his heart beating. It was rather contagious excitement and disgust of the other man's vulgarity; for Mr Prince Varley had used her Christian name in a manner that struck him as laboured and unfamiliar.

"Very well, then," said she; "please let us be good friends. . . . When did you get home? Have your father and mother come back? Mrs Varley was going to stay the summer, I thought."

The Definite Issue Inevitable

"No, but, Miss West—Barbara!" he persisted. "So standoffish, you know. I must—"

Then there was a little sound of scuffling, and from Barbara, under her breath, "If you do—ah!—let me go at once! How dare you think of—"

Enoch stood with his hand on the curtain, violently trembling. He had almost betrayed her.

"I had to do it," said Mr Prince Varley, noisily. "Hang it, you are so pretty, my dear girl. Ah! how is a fellow to stand it?"

Barbara did not speak, and he made some sprightly attempts to renew the conversation. "Now, don't be offended or I shall never forgive myself, you know. . . . Don't! If I didn't think such a lot of you I should have done it long ago. . . . Jove, how you struggled! You're as strong as a young colt. I shouldn't have had half a chance, but I'm a bit of an athlete, you know. . . . Feel ever so much better now, though. . . . Miss West! Won't you sit down? I came to say something very particular."

Drawing the curtain aside, Enoch saw that she stood looking out of the window, while he, with his back to the mantelpiece, pulled at his big moustache with a sheepish look, considering her. "Do sit down, Miss West," he implored.

"You must first apologise for your rudeness," said Barbara, turning, and Enoch let the curtain fall. "Not now; in writing, please. I am very much grieved by it, and glad to see you are ashamed. I shall bid you good-afternoon."

"No, hang it, Miss West!" he burst out. "For a stolen kiss! You can't mean it, dash it all!"

"Indeed, but I do, Mr Varley," she told him.

"But, my dear, I'm dying for you," he said. "Don't you understand? You're the one woman

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in all the world I really fancy. I feel when I look at you—"

"Still, you should do as I wish," said Barbara. "You must write me a nice apology, and then I may explain."

There was a moment of silence.

"Oh, lor!" groaned Mr Prince Varley. "My dear girl, I can't write two successive words, 'pon honna. *Be* merciful. I do assure you, as soon's I see a sheet of paper I haven't an idea! I apologise, of course—to the sweetest little tyrant in the world, bless it! Shall I go on my knees? Ah, you're laughing! I knew you didn't mean it, you puss!" And some quick movement followed.

"Mr Varley—I insist!" Barbara struggled.

No longer master of his wits, Enoch stood in the room with them both. He had instantly the thought of concealment, but it was too late; Varley let go the lady, watched her eager confusion, and laughed.

Muttered words fell from Enoch, while he was at a loss how to save appearances. "Insolent hound!—Barbara, why don't you tell him to leave the house?"

Her former idea seemed to be all she could think of, and, with a show of pretty manners that was desperately weak, she began to introduce them: "My brother Con—Mr Varley; Con, you know I wanted you to stay in this—"

"Look here," said Enoch, stepping up fiercely to his enemy, "you're a cad, and I don't want to know you; Miss West does as she likes. But you behave yourself!"

Barbara plucked him by the sleeve, crying quickly, "Con! you silly boy!"

He turned wide eyes upon her. "You don't mean to stand that? It was an assault! A caddish, brutal assault!"

And when she pleaded with a red face, "Con, do con-

The Definite Issue Inevitable

trol yourself, Mr Varley will think you have no manners," he took command of the situation.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and shook her off with no reply else. Catching sight of Mr Prince Varley's hat and stick upon the table, he snatched them up and shot out of the room with them; and disregarding the nervous command of "Con! Come back! Do you hear?" got the street door open and threw them far out. Their owner followed him, somewhat less excited, while Barbara fluttered after, apologising—unnoticed by either one led captain or the other.

Enoch Watson stood with his hand upon the open door, a cubit magnificently added to his wrathful stature.

"All right, young-fellow-my-lad," said Varley as he passed, "I'll settle with you another time;" and was then shut out with no waste of ceremony.

Our hero came to himself in the room, somewhat tremulous. He heard Barbara, whom he had left in the passage somewhere, call out pleasantly, "It's all right, Mrs Shuttlewell." It seemed to be so at last. But she entered a moment later, and, scarcely glancing at him, began with a suspicion of tears in her manner to say that she was very much vexed, and would never have thought it of him; what Mr Varley would imagine she really could not say, but now *she* would have to apologise.

"And I think it's too bad," she ended, getting out her lace handkerchief. "You should have done as I asked you, and then it wouldn't have happened."

Poor Barbara did not cry. The case was too perplexing for tears. She sat herself down by the door and made up the handkerchief into a little ball.

"All right," said Enoch, speaking from his rival's commanding place on the rug. "I've nothing to say,

Barbara West

Barbara. But if you speak to him again after this, I've done with it."

"It was so shameful," she went on. "What will he think?"

"What was shameful? My coming in?" he asked.

She sat erect, but with a face resigned to trouble.

"He *knows* it is a bedroom," she said quietly.

It had not occurred to either of them that the words "My brother Con" might have put this right. Enoch, fretting under a sense of indiscretion, pressed home his ultimatum.

"What does that matter? He has nothing to do with it, unless you are going to see him again."

Still she thought to evade him. The truth was, that his anger and unimagined resolution of conduct daunted her. "It is dreadful," she said.

After giving her a little time he again insisted. Even to his own ears his voice was harsh. "But you've done with him. Have you? I want to know."

"How do you mean, Con?" said Barbara, shrinking.

"It is what I came to-day to tell you," he said, and went over to her. "I can't stand him; I must have your answer, Barbara; I—all this last fortnight I have never had a moment's happiness. I can't; it's no use pretending. Say you won't, dear—not speak to him, I mean, or see him."

"But that is nonsense, Con," she said, with pale lips.

"I can't help it," he answered. "I've tried, and you must choose between us."

He had a full glance of her frightened eyes, and she flushed. "Con, dear, you are excited," she told him. Then she took his hand and kissed it, and stood up beside him. "You think I care for him, and I don't. But I can't do that; it would be so—*outré*."

The Definite Issue Inevitable

He said to himself that he had known well what answer he should have. But for a moment he spoke more gently. "Why not?" he asked. "If you don't care for him you can."

"Besides, I shall have to explain. . . . Oh, it's impossible, Con!"

"Well," he turned away, "I don't want to force you. I suppose you mean that we had better . . . say good-bye, then."

And all she answered was, "Don't talk like that, dear; it only hurts us."

His hand she had not let go.

"Then it is good-bye," he said like a whisper.

She shook her pretty head, smiling at him wistfully; and at that he suddenly sobbed and clasped her. In his arms she grew all rosy; but his blind thought was that this must be the last time, and he held her tight. Presently she glanced up, thinking to give him her lips at last, and was startled by the wildness of his look.

"Poor old Con!" she murmured.

He caught his breath and held her off at arms' length: Speaking from a dry throat, and with eyes that seemed to her to blaze in the depths of them, he ejaculated, "Choose! You must."

Barbara shuddered, suspecting him not quite sane, and said hurriedly, "Let us sit down, Con, and talk about it quietly."

"No, you must choose now," he said.

"Oh," she cried, "you are cruel, too dreadful!" and disengaged herself.

Her eyes indeed were blinking, and for a skilful combatant the fight was won. But he was steeled to recognise in that rebellious cry the last word; and when she walked away to the great arm-chair and threw her-

Barbara West

self down in it, sulking or weeping he did not know, Enoch looked about for his cap in a maze of grief. He had to fetch it from the bedroom—the sight of her forgotten frocks there choked him—and then he waited. She gave no sign. Cruel she, too, seemed to him to be. He waited long enough to feel the spur of resentment at so much obstinacy in a dear companion—dear as his life, he vowed even now.

“Good-bye,” he forced.

She sobbed, and hope sprang up like a flame in smoke.

“Barbara! . . . Ah, I am going.”

“Oh, go!” burst from her.

That confounded him. “You choose,” he said, with an awful dismay. “Good-bye, then.”

A convulsion shook her, but she made no other answer; and, disdaining to plead, he had to make good the word. Like a prisoner who hears his sentence he got a last blurred impression of the sunlit room, and quietly passed out of it and out of the house.

There sat in the street by a singular chance, as if in waiting, that strange abortion he had seen her once befriend. From the pavement opposite the imperfect being watched him with a repulsive spasm of wizened features, in which the pursed eyes twinkled.

CHAPTER XXVII

TWO LETTERS

AFTER all, the forced manner of his breaking with her seemed unnatural, and left with Enoch small content because it was not kindly managed. Had he at heart believed the breach to be final, there were moments that day and the next when his resolution must have yielded to panic; for, as it was his nature not to form a great decision easily, in review he questioned all decisions with candour. He was not unaware that, so far, he had failed of his true purpose, or that in doing violence to his affection he had perhaps surrendered the treasure of his heart to a discomfited scamp. But the conviction that Barbara would seek a reconciliation helped him to hold out; to have acted resolutely was a great appeasement, and he could always sound the loud timbrel over Mr Prince Varley, whose single-minded pursuit of his hat and stick in a crisis appealed irresistibly to his sense of humour. For the rest, he had no visiting doubts of his pretension to govern her in such a matter. Not self-reproach distressed him, but the natural horror and fret of a violated sentiment; and this, no doubt, would have passed away quite easily had Barbara owned him right.

But Barbara's quick displeasure was deep-seated. She had never been so roughly handled; she saw herself horribly the victim of a crazy boy, who had left her without caring in the least what shame and perplexity he had brought upon her. He amazed her. Oh, she was wise not to think of marrying! Such a revelation of the egoism in passion left her cold.

Barbara West

And of perplexity and shame she underwent a great deal in the endeavour to put herself right with the worthless Varley. Say what she would, Barbara could not be sure that this offended suitor acquitted her of blame for Enoch's hidden presence. He took her word about it instantly, but with a rather alarming return of his "little puss" manner, which might be very kind, but suggested that she did not deal quite frankly with him. The truth was, of course, that upon hearing the name, "Mr Watson," he supposed "My brother Con" to have been an invention of the moment. He found her still more charming when she went on to beg him not to think anything more about it—"I mean, if you meet Mr Watson again. Of course he is jealous and silly," she said, "and he was very rude. I'm seriously angry with him. But don't let there be any unpleasantness; I mean I can't bear that sort of thing."

He consented, under much protest, to let the outrage pass; and she felt that Mr Varley made her a sacrifice of pride. After yielding he looked quite miserable. It had cost her a blush to tell anyone that Enoch was jealous, and she now enlarged upon his good qualities to let Mr Varley see that he would be doing well to forgive him. If she had thought that it might be brought about, she would have held out hopes of an apology. But Varley did not ask for that, and she bade him good-day—as she had greeted him—with a smile that set his heart plunging (the awkward interview was of her seeking); and her displeasure with Enoch gathered new fretfulness. At least, she thought, Con owed an apology to her!

Darbyshire took sides with Enoch, the ambush and the hat and stick incident being much to his taste.

"Aint she wonderful?" he asked, with a little toss of the head. Spoken on a rising inflection and with

Two Letters

the toss, that was Jack's more emphatic way of saying "Tut, tut," or "Dear me." What drew it from him was Barbara's obstinate wish to patch up a friendship between his friend and Varley. He had been one broad grin for the previous five minutes, but upon that he looked quite serious.

"Aint she wonderful? Sort of blessed peacemaker. Buy Varley a new hat if he'd let her. But you don't mean to say it's all off, old man?"

Enoch shook his head, implying that there was nothing more to be made of it.

"Take my oath," said Darbyshire, after a pause, "I liked that girl better than any I ever met—except my little wife that is to be."

"How was it you left her, Jack?" he asked now for the second time; and Darbyshire gave a new answer, unlike the first, but equally droll.

"Dunno. Mixed me up, I think. Felt like a little dog in a nice topcoat with a bit o' sugar on my nose."

Enoch laughed feebly. If he had vaguely hoped for any comfort in another man's discomfiture, he was disappointed. The uneasy sense remained that with more heart he might have won her; for he could not allow that Darbyshire had known her as well as he had, or that she could care for Varley.

"Ah, well," he said, referring to Jack's marriage, "you are lucky. Is it five weeks now, or a month?"

Darbyshire held four fingers up, his eyes twinkling. The question made him thoughtful. They were walking with linked arms, as usual, and Enoch felt his own arm pressed more firmly. After a long silence Darbyshire spoke again.

"Hard hit, old chap?"

The friendly inquiry hit hard, at all events; young

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Watson was near upon tears, and had to choke them back. But he replied to it at last, with a red-faced attempt to present the answer as a careful estimate of moral and intellectual damage.

"N-no. Not very."

Darbyshire gave him time.

"I wanted you," he resumed, "for my best man, y'know. Young Watson in a top hat and a frock coat, don't see? Rather fancied it! Not now, of course; a bit too rough on a fellow who's just lost his girl."

Fired by an honour in friendship, Enoch's affection for his friend was instantly aglow.

"Rough! To help you to get married? What nonsense! I shall be delighted; why, it's great!" Like the boy he was, he began to laugh with pleasure and pride. "But what does the best man do? I don't know anything about it—where to be, or what to say."

"Oh, you see to me—see that I turn up shipshape and keep my pecker up; dash water on me if I feel faint. You stand by me, don't you know?—tell me when to say things if I miss my cue; pal on to the parson and make him happy. You do things generally, in fact."

"No, but really!" said Enoch, between anxiety and laughter.

"Don't know? Mean to say you don't really know? Oh, my! Nice thing in best men, I must say. Look here, get to the facts, as old Ireton says." And Darbyshire, to cheer him up, reeled off a string of nonsense.

"I mustn't miss my train for Nottingham, that's poz, aint it? Very well, you sit up to waken me. Get there, want a swell four-wheeler, don't we? You hire it, and put the horse's white ear-caps on; flower for the driver. Pop me in and ask me if I've left the ring at home. Right away! Keep my mind from dwelling on things, then I can turn up smiling. See?

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"Good; we're at the church, face up at the altar. Parson there, all right; parson not there, *you* grub around in the green-room, find him, announce Mother's Pride and Joy. Come back and pat me on the back. Feel my pulse. Might hum a little tune while the bride comes. I shall stagger when she does, of course—better have a pin ready, prick me instantly. I introduce you, and there we are! After that," said Jack, impressively, "you take one pace to the rear; you're not in it, young Watson. Be good enough to step back out of the halo. . . . Get the merry little J pen ready, that's all *you've* to do—must have a J—and help later on to sign the register, usual precaution against bigamy."

People who passed paused to watch them with amusement.

"Any more? No, I think that's all, young Watson, thank you. Pay the parson and the registrar, of course—bill to me, if I survive—and then off we go to the breakfast. . . . Oh, of course you'll want some rice, half a pound at the grocer's, day before. Easy with the rice, though! Drop it as the gentle dew from heaven."

Enoch stood wiping his eyes, and Jack looked on, well pleased with that effect of his volubility.

"Got it all down? My boy, I've been there before. Most honourable job! The parson and the old man both come along in your cab. Also, afterwards, you mash the bridesmaids and propose the health of the bride and bridegroom."

"Make a speech?" cried Enoch, suddenly brought up. "No, I can't do that."

"Pooh, yes!" said Jack. "Nothing simpler, old man. You'll be all right when the time comes. What about me?"

In the interval between this cheerful conversation and the wedding, Mr Sam Mitchell, the new member

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for Merchanton, gave a garden-party to his "workers," that is to say, to the crowd of ardent politicians who had generously cried him up in public and in private, sparing no effort to obtain his heart's desire. Barbara was asked to play to them. The invitation being not very delicately worded, and she quite ignorant of political functions, the footing she would stand upon with respect to the guests in general gave her some concern. She consulted Varley, but found him contemptuous of "Sam Mitchell" and unsympathetic, and she was thrown back upon her own judgment.

Con would have known, she thought; it was just his business to know about politics. He deserved to be well shaken and smacked!

Barbara might do her best to stand upon the rights of the quarrel; it was never in her heart to lose him. She had talked about Con to her new admirer till Mr Prince Varley cursed him deeply in his private mind. How should he do other? Anxious to make it clear that Enoch had no right to act as he had done, she not only enlarged upon her own good conduct towards him, but never tired of insisting, with a *naïveté* very trying to Varley's hopes, that in respect of her behaviour with him, too, there was nothing on which to reproach herself. He writhed while he profited by this candour. Had he abused Enoch, or endorsed her censure by only a word now and then, Barbara would have turned to find excuses and he would have lost some ground. A single fault in tactics told him this. Instead of doing so, he proffered solace and mild endearment; and, though the more familiar manner passed unnoticed, he established a new footing.

For what advantage this might give him he had to wait. Barbara no less than Enoch held to the hope of a reconciliation, and much ran in her head to make

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the silence of her lover distressing. It was not alone that she missed him—thoughts of him besetting her as a habit—or that a rupture so unkind was inconceivable and daunted her; it was also that, for the first time, she reviewed their intimacy with a little persistent smart of shame. It had been too close for a light severance not to leave some possibility of his thinking ill of her. With nobody but him—nobody, she thought—could she have been so free, or ever be so free again; and after ten days of waiting, nursing her dignity and always unhappy and restless, she had to tell herself twenty times a day that of course they must make it up. She recalled continually the sweet hours of boy-and-girl intimacy for proof, and said aloud, “Oh, I must *see* him!” Love spoke in the cry. Of course, if he would not apologise, said Barbara, she could never, never respect him as she had done. Mr Varley had apologised to *her*, and that should satisfy him; for if Con had stayed in the room it would not have happened. But, reason as she would, love still in a sort constrained her. She was downcast most when most assured of acting reasonably.

For, if Con always refused to meet him, she foresaw it to be impossible to keep Varley’s friendship without conscious double-dealing; and to her open nature anything of the kind was afflictive—insupportable, unless she were allowed to explain it.

“I am sure,” she said, “I don’t care for him. But why not let me drop him politely, as I would? Con is dreadful! dreadful!” she repeated. “How am I ever to manage it? . . . I must. Yes, I shall just simply tell him everything, and he will have to learn patience.” Tears filled her eyes. She saw herself doing a difficult thing to please him, and yet in continual broils; and, but for a preoccupation, distress would have set her

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valuing the sacrifice. Barbara imagined Con repining, fretted by suspicions, taking amiss her necessary stand on behalf of common sense and lady-like behaviour, and breaking his heart over it. That gave her preoccupation enough. Sympathy and the intrinsic wish to be understood, to see the proof of her honesty in others' perfect sense of all she did, urged her alike to patch up the quarrel. But how? These same instincts warned her not to hope for much satisfaction in doing so.

Did Barbara realise that love was much in question? Love, with her, was not an all-absorbing passion, subduing the mind and the will, albeit a passionate suitor might surprise it. But was she aware of the sway it had upon her?

Was hers a mind at all disposed to look into itself and to take account? On the contrary, she found her support in all things, her pleasure and justification, her very sense of being, in a closer contact with other minds than is common—for the view of herself therein discovered. Love and the sense of shame went only to sharpen her anxiety about the reflection in Con's mind; and, this anxiety not satisfied, it is evident that a grievance would remain to her, strong enough to sustain her in the part of *femme incomprise*. Did Enoch never reflect, for his part, that the woman not understood may be too grateful to a smooth admirer, even to a dull and coarse one? In this respect, Barbara's quest of a means to recover touch with him that should not look too much like yielding might be critical.

Her clever head was at its busiest, her heart at its lowest, when she received the invitation to the garden-party. The thought which, coming like an inspiration, at last decided her to accept it, was that doing so gave her an opportunity to write a non-committal note to

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Enoch ; and thus it was that he found at the office a little pink envelope addressed in her hand, and tore it open expecting he knew not what. Nearly a fortnight had gone by since they parted.

Here is what, after several drafts rejected as either too warm or too cold, she had contrived to say :—

“DEAR CON,—I am playing on Saturday next at a garden-party at Mr Samuel Mitchell’s, Ingham Park, and I thought you would like to know for the paper. I suppose you won’t be there yourself, but if you are, I hope we may meet. I have not quite decided to forgive you—you were really very naughty, more than I thought you could be *possibly*—but Mr Varley has promised to do so and I think you should know this. I am well, and should like to hear that you are. It is all very stupid, don’t you think?—I mean our behaving as if we were not friends, when we know each other so well. With best wishes, believe me yours very sincerely,

BARBARA.

“P.S.—Give my love to Mr Darbyshire ; you are not jealous of *him*. Do come. I shall play *your favourite piece*.”

Alas for golden bridges ! Enoch saw but one thing in this nice approach—she appeared to have begged Varley not to thrash him ! With the needless shame this caused him, chagrin was mingled ; for the expectation of a fierce encounter with that insufferable snob was what had kept him from repining.

Short as the following letter is, he spent much time upon it, and sundry tears :—

“DEAR BARBARA,—You are very forgiving, and

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kinder to me than I deserve, but I cannot go on with our friendship as it is. We are so differently made that I had to give you up, though it felt like tearing my heart out to do so.

"But you must not think that I have ceased to love you. I almost wish I could do so, because now I know for certain that you will never be my wife, or anything more to me than you are.

"I will tell you what you are to me, Barbara, now for the last time. I am sure that God never made a dearer, purer girl to bless some man with wonder and undeserved happiness, so as to let him know that there may be somewhere a place called Heaven. I doubted that there was, and perhaps that is why I have to turn away, as a kind of punishment; but I shall never doubt any more while I remember you and what it was to look into a woman's heart.

"So you see we are more than friends. Some day I may come to see you again, but now I cannot. I have not been invited to Mitchell's garden-party. And do you think I could have listened to your playing with people around me?

"I am glad you are doing so well, and you may be sure I will see that the musical programme is not forgotten by the reporter. Of course there will be no critical appreciation such as you get at concerts.

"Good-bye. It seems queer to write that, but I do not mean 'Good-bye for ever.'—Always your true lover,
CON."

Barbara was very wistful-minded when she had read this letter. In beginning it she was startled and distressed by what seemed to her the queer, tragical

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tone, sincere and very like him, yet pitched in such a key of resignation as to bewilder her painfully. But the letter contained a confession immensely grateful to her self-respect. She shed bright tears upon it. It was long to be stored among her treasures, and wept over afresh in days to come; but for the time it so restored her peace of mind, leaving a door of hope just ajar, that she wiped her eyes cheerfully. After all, she had expected it; all she had doubted was his opinion of her. Dear Con! Perhaps he was right about being differently made; but yet—for all that, her brother Con was the best friend she had, or had ever had. . . . Barbara cried.

Later, she resolutely took her violin up for a long day's practice. But she had continually to apply her mind anew to the music; the tendency to play mechanically, while thought went flitting, was Barbara's worst practice-fault; at the end of one heroic hour she put the violin back, owning herself not in the mood for playing.

"I fink I'm tired," she said. She shut the case decisively, fished out a "novelette" from under the sofa cushion, and sat down to read.

The story had seemed rather good overnight. Now she turned over page after page of it and supposed that she had come to a specially dull chapter. It fell upon her knee. She looked about, pouting discontent with the dingy room, and thought of sundry little things she had to do—a flower in her hat to change, buttons to sew on her gloves, a pair of new boots to try.

Quite suddenly she was aware of an ominous depression of spirits.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BRIDEGROOM AND BEST MAN

JACK DARBYSHIRE's wedding was very unlike his droll foreshadowing of it, though sufficiently merry in its own way. Jack himself was the soberest person who had to do with it, and his friend behaved like a practised master of ceremonies. We may discover in this exchange of idiosyncrasies the various virtue of enthusiasm.

They set out for Nottingham one Friday afternoon to sleep at an hotel there; for the risk of missing his train had been Darbyshire's one worry. Belying their prognostication, Ireton had "made no bones" of giving them a day off in addition to the bridegroom's summer fortnight, which began with the wedding-day. The journey had its little diversions. When they were seated in the train, face to face, the best man realised the bridegroom's happiness so keenly that he hit him hard in the chest. The bridegroom, who was looking pensive, rallied with a good deal of spirit, and any strong-minded old lady who had chanced to travel in the same compartment would probably have stopped the train. They ended the mock combat in opposite corners, Enoch with his hat-box, Jack with a new portmanteau, held aloft in act to hurl them.

That sufficed for a time, the day being warm. They let down the windows, put their caps up on the racks, and spread themselves — the bridegroom with a certain elegance that Enoch much admired in him, and in nobody else.

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Still the best man was restless. He had to look out of the windows in order not to smile too often at his friend. When their eyes met he always said something—by way of developing the great idea of which their minds were full already. When he remarked, "To-morrow morning, old man!" or, "We shall remember this!" the smile became a broad grin. Darbyshire smiled back at him, but with a steadiness glistening in his blue eyes that impressed Enoch somehow as pathetic, and went on twirling his wonderful fair moustache. The carriage filled, and they put on everyday looks. When, at Sheffield, they were left alone again, Darbyshire as the train started was betrayed by a sense of relief into kissing his hand to some ladies on the platform. He had a slight blush after it, and said apologetically, "Last time;" nevertheless for the next twenty miles or so they signalled every girl who looked their way.

It was only at Nottingham that Enoch began to think him lukewarm: nervous, of course, the intrepid Darbyshire could never be! First he did not care to go out after tea and walk about the town, and next he brightened up extravagantly on seeing the bill of a music-hall. They spent a couple of hours listening to very coarse and depressing songs, music-halls being then at the stupidest; and they went up to bed quite early.

Enoch was thinking, "Ten hours—only ten; and not really more than three, for we sha'n't be awake." But he did not announce the calculation. As they undressed in a double-bedded room he was positively daunted by Darbyshire's quiet mood, and had begun to wonder what his thoughts were. Was Darbyshire quite sure of being happy? The eve of marriage, he reflected, must be an awful thing to those who were

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not sure—like the time of summing up in an Assize Court. He pondered on the recent case of a distracted girl, somewhere in Hungary, who was said to have screamed out in strong hysterics at the altar, lost her wits, and died within twenty-four hours.

When the man who jocularly called himself his mother's pride and joy knelt to say his prayers, Enoch's appreciation of his character, as well as of his mood, was rectified with a shock. He had not suspected Darbyshire of prayers; and there he knelt in his night-gown, like a boy who has not left home.

Enoch hurried into bed and tried to make no noise in getting in, so Jack might think that he, too, had been at his devotions, if he had kept them short. But the sudden tax upon his self-possession, and the reminder that, with him, the whole matter of mere beliefs was an open question, startled him like some precipice approached in a mist.

Darbyshire put out the gas, made himself snug between the sheets, and presently spoke across the darkened room. "Good-night, old man," he said.

Enoch would have liked to talk. "Good-night," he answered; and it sounded so bare and poor that he added hardily, "God bless you!"

"Thanks," said Darbyshire.

An hour later they were still awake. The street lamps lighted up the window-blinds and made streaks of light along the ceiling. Enoch's cogitations had passed from grave to gay at the recollection of his duties on the morrow as Jack had sketched them, and he chuckled now and then.

"Can't sleep?" Darbyshire asked at last.

"I'm thinking of that halo," he replied; and, rising upon his elbow, he observed with discrimination that this was a great time.

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"Night before the execution," said Darbyshire, motionless. . . . "Wonder how the dear little girl feels! . . . *Must* make her happy."

"Why, you old duffer, she's bound to be happy!" cried Enoch.

"Think so?"

"Think! I'm sure she will." What had come over Darbyshire, any way?

"Little tiny house, you know," said the bridegroom. "No money worth speaking of, though they give me more now Paine's gone. Sha'n't be at home too much, either."

"Jack, you're morbid!" Enoch cried. "It's that ghastly music-hall."

He threw the clothes off and sat up on the edge of the bed, with some notion of making a diversion. Two girls at this juncture would have been in one another's arms, but Enoch could only argue.

"What does it matter," he said, "when you love each other? If you'd a fortune, wouldn't you give it away just to be you, now?"

"Blue it like a lord," came Darbyshire's reply.

"Very well, then! . . . I'm going to dance;" and he began to execute a slow burlesque of one of the music-hall "turns," moving between the other bed and the windows. Darbyshire sat up instantly; young Watson was enjoying himself, and that was funny.

"I say! New entertainment!" he cried. "Silhouettes, by the Inimitable Watson, Silent Song and Dance Artist." Thereupon Enoch had to stop for laughing; but he took a sheet from the bed and improvised even stranger attitudes.

"Ray-ray-ray-ray!" Darbyshire was the music-hall crowd and drummed with his heels on the mattress. "Hengcore! Brayvo! Whe-e-e-w!" He whistled shrilly with his fingers.

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There came a loud knocking on the floor from below, and angry cries from the next room, so it had to cease. But when Enoch's bed had been made again, and they had talked awhile with low voices, sleep fell upon them at unawares.

They slept without dreams, and healthy sleep in youth is death to care. Darbyshire sprang out of bed as he cried "All right!" to the peremptory loud summons of Boots. The room was softly alight with early sunshine, beams of it and vague reflections playing through the blinds; and Enoch, not so wide awake yet, saw him look at his watch and then stand listening, elate.

"Best man!" he called, "get up and pinch me. Is that a peal of bells, or am I overjoyed?"

Positively there was a confusion of faintly distant bells in the quiet air. Enoch cried "Hooray!" and leaped from his bed in turn. What bells? The bridegroom shook his head at the best man's joy of quick credulity. No matter; it was Darbyshire's wedding-day. Great omen!

Darbyshire began to dress with alacrity and care. He said, "Of course you'll do the ringers well. Blow the expense! *Noblesse oblige*, my boy, Hope you've not been stingy with the evergreens and little flags either. A mean triumphal arch looks bad. How do you like the red silk socks, young Watson?"

The socks were only to be characterised in superlatives.

"Also observe the neat lavender bags with the faint blue stripe."

"Great!" said Enoch. "They're like mine, you know."

"So they are. Good old bells! Local band, *I trust*; conciliates the populace. What a day, though! Let's have the merry blinds up."

The sky was one arch of blue, and Enoch raised a

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window to let in the morning air and a little more of that fine clamour.

The critical business of dressing, because it demanded some attention, made him conscious of the day's excitement as if he held his breath. He was ready first, to the flower in his coat; and Darbyshire, still shaving, seemed to him to have been engaged with brush and razor and strop for twenty minutes. Whether or not they had coffee before the cab came, and when or how he paid the bill, were things he could not afterwards remember. From facing the coffee-room waiter onward he was master of his acts and words in none but a histrionic way.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GREATEST MOMENT IN LIFE

THEY were set down beneath a lofty church, and its austere dignity, the absence of any show of life thereabouts, and the bells that murmured from a still remoter distance, were sobering auspices. A shadow from tall enclosing houses covered them, and only spire and pinnacles were bright, uplifted to the cloudless sky.

The cavernous church seemed empty. Behind a pillar of the south aisle, however, they surprised a little yellow-skinned man. This official, whom Enoch of the Nonconformist past identified as a chapel-keeper, and Jack in a whisper called "the curator, the lay curate," wore a high stock, propping up lean and puffy cheeks, a long old-fashioned coat with a collar still higher at the back, knee breeches, and very flat shoes. Caught fumbling with a big red handkerchief, he nodded quickly—they understood that out of deference he postponed the wiping of his nose—and forthwith he waddled round and up the central aisle before them. Enoch saw a dissembled snuff-box in the palm of one of his hands, and warmed to him for Macdonald's sake. Arrived at the altar-rails, he nodded to the front seat on the right and waddled away. In such surroundings nothing could have been more encouraging than this behaviour. It assured them that what was to follow would keep the course of nature.

Now let the rites begin!

His shuffling footfall on the matting ceased to whisper among the echoes, and the musty chill and gloom of the

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ancient building took possession of their spirits, disquieting expectancy.

They remained standing. Darbyshire took his gloves off, looking pale, and then drew himself up in the manner, Enoch thought, of a soldier to be presently shot by a picket. However, he responded to the smile of affection in Enoch's eyes, and said with confidence and extreme good cheer, "She must be on the way, dear boy." But a long silence reigned, and something had to be done. Enoch attentively studied the sunlit unintelligible east window to engage his friend's attention, and Darbyshire responded to this diversion also. The clergyman came hurriedly out into the chancel while they were making poor fun of it, and disappeared immediately to put his surplice on. But for this unfortunate occupation of theirs he might conceivably have spoken to them. They were rebuked.

Some loiterers, attracted by their cab, clumsily pushed through the doors, exciting them prematurely, and curiosity as to the kind of dear little girl whom his friend had chosen began in Enoch to prevail over all emotions else. He forgot to talk. But the spell of waiting spun out endless, because they had come ten minutes early.

Enoch, when the time came, was decorous to a fault, as your histrion is apt to be. A rustle of silk trains, and with it the creak of a gentlemanly pair of new boots, divided his attention with the priest, who advanced to the altar-rail in a manner to play the principal rôle; and so he stood with a stiff, slight inclination of the body between the opposing actors, awaiting his cue blankly.

Darbyshire was presenting him to the bride. He raised his eyes upon a shining, mystical vision of millinery, and caught a smile—sun gleaming in mist—

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as he made obeisance to it. Two small sisters of the bride prettily beamed and curtsied without affectation, in gratitude for fine bouquets he had sent from Merchanton; and then their father shook him by the hand with a respectful cordiality that seemed to exceed his merits. This gentleman was a stout little man, clean shaven and tightly fitted into his clothes, a gentleman with serious eyes but a certain prim alertness and look of self-indulgent ease that belied them.

The clergyman softly cleared his throat, the bride and bridegroom faced him, and after a seemingly pause they were addressed as "Dearly beloved." The solemnisation was upon them.

It came upon Enoch, heard by him for the first time, with an awful virtue of impressiveness.

True, his ear was alert for unconvincing passages, with a sense of their archaic form; caught at words and locutions that begged all questions for him. Yet what was done, and the manner of it, were alike profoundly moving, so that the memory of that half-hour would be ineffaceable.

Indeed, the greatness of what was done, the excellent merit and delight of it, at one point uplifted him. That was when, after the grave and plain exordium, his friend was directly challenged: "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

Darbyshire and the beautiful unknown girl stood side by side, and the arrest of Enoch's faculties made them seem alone in the church; and Darbyshire listened, and said in an altered voice, "I will." So, briefly, he vowed his life. Then, with no abatement of terms, rather with an

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additional rigour, the like question was being put to her while her wreath trembled. Darbyshire did not turn his head, but let it fall a little. Her answer was faintly clear, recalling a bird's inquiring note in the stillness after rain. The tension ceased with it. Enoch caught his breath on a sob.

The bridegroom was looking to him for the ring, and he gave it hurriedly, as if by delay he might impair an incantation. But then there came the surrender of the bride by her father, from which it seemed that the answer "I will" was not taken as a giving of troth. "Wilt thou have?" meant "Art thou minded to have?" Alas! what it is to be hyper-critical. Confused, Enoch saw their hands joined, and heard Darbyshire prompted with the words that plighted him indeed; and he missed the former sense of solemnity. It was only as he listened to the sweet and timid repetition of the bride that his heart again engaged itself.

Besides, what happened next gave him a start. The Rubric directs it so, but it is not often followed. He saw Darbyshire place upon the priest's book not only the ring, but a half-sovereign and a half-crown. Darbyshire had them in a little pile, which was deposited without any sound of money passing; and the priest, raising the book, quietly nodded with a countenance unchanged. The ring was returned that Darbyshire might place it upon his wife's finger, but Enoch did not see what became of the money; when he looked again it had vanished. He had a long moment of absolute fright, his struggle with an impulse to smile being so doubtful; and was devoutly thankful to see everybody kneeling, so that he could hide his face.

The short prayer for sure fidelity and a continuance of love restored him. They would be happy, he thought. Not a doubt of it. How sweetly confident her promise

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to obey and honour had been! She knew well Jack's gentle nature.

At long last it was over and everybody smiling. In the vestry he heard the pompous little man, her father, congratulate the parson, shaking him briefly by the hand. "Accept my thanks, sir," he said. "Most impressive ceremony." Darbyshire affected dismay at the absence of J pens. He said to his wife, "Clumsy forgery, my dear, but best I can do." For her own signature, written carefully with a wonderful white round arm, he patted her on the shoulder; and her quick, shy smile at him gave a glimpse of maiden happiness that Enoch dropped his eyes before. The name was Minnie Bolsover.

Mr Paul Bolsover put up a gold pinch-nose and signed large.

Enoch, facetious with unusual courage, made the pretty bridesmaids giggle by offering the pen in turn to them also; whereupon Mr Bolsover said archly, "Another time, Mr Watson; eh, Clare?" which caused Miss Clara Bolsover to blush provokingly, and Mr Watson to blush also. But the best man promised himself an agreeable time at breakfast, and had to smile as he marched down the aisle with Mr Bolsover, because that gentleman rolled a lively eye upon him, humming "The Wedding March" of Mendelssohn and strutting on air. Mr Bolsover was going to be funny. He tipped the vergers a crown piece.

And fun began at the porch, where, after tossing a shower of rice over the bride, Enoch in some excitement displaced Darbyshire's hat with the next handful.

"Bless my soul!" said Mr Bolsover. "Gimme a handful, quick!" The plump little figure danced a moment, and the rice was hurled point blank at the grinning face of the cabman holding a door for his daughter.

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Mr Bolsover's distress at such a misadventure was comical. He cried in a mild voice, "Oh, gracious!" and bolted among the lookers-on. When Enoch joined him in the best man's cab after seeing the bridesmaids disposed, and asked if they were to wait for the clergyman, Mr Bolsover was found, however, to be holding a handkerchief to his mouth, pink with laughter. He looked out with bleared eyes at the question, and shook his head.

"Parson? No, no!" he said with a gentle cry. "Oh, that's nearly done for me! Did you see me?"

They drove off, and he gave way to his merriment on a high faint note of "He-he-he's" that seemed to emerge from his fat little person in a strenuous and quiet rapture. He held out a deprecatory hand to beg no interruption. "Man was laughing!" he got out, swaying upon his seat. "Went plump—in his mouth." His own laugh became a musical "Ho-ho-ho," and his eyes were fixed upon Enoch in a wistful stare, as if he explored a hint of what the world was coming to. He protested innocence. "Hadn't the least idea. Whacked it—all my might—down his throat! Oh, crikey!" The suffocation threatened to exhaust him. He leaned forward laying a hand on Enoch's knee, and pulled off his hat, which rolled from the seat without concerning him.

Mr Bolsover's discreet and rapid evasion, and the contrast of this private gaiety with his public strut, were irresistibly funny. Enoch and he overcrowded each other, peal on peal, Enoch trying to pick the hat up.

"Best laugh I've had for twenty years," said Mr Bolsover at last, as he wiped his face. "Blest if I don't give him half-a-crown—wash down the rice."

CHAPTER XXX

FEASTING AND GOD-SPEED

WE make of marriage in England a singular distraction; first it is greatly solemn, then most merry: and yet we are only foolish when the marriage is. Like a sweet comedy of the stage, the happy marriage sounds a full gamut of emotion, touching all notes true.

The lookers-on in one case and the other are moved each as his own breast is an instrument in tune. So are the actors too; but Enoch Watson, whom you see in a small part of walking gentleman in the play now enacting, is more spectator than performer. Was this the reason why, in all the solemn first act as well as in the prologue, no thought of Barbara and what might have been afflicted him? Was he, in fact, only so glad for his friend that sadness cried no undertone, or are we to suppose him heart-whole? Chorus puts the question quaintly in an *entr'acte*, and exit.

The cab stopped in a street of the suburbs where there were trees waving in bright gardens; and the happy father, stroking his hat, stepped out with an air of cheerful gravity and pushed one hand into a high tight fob. Wearing spats, he had the look of standing on his toes, a cock-robin of a man. His manner of tipping the battered cabman was a lesson in deportment to the neighbourhood.

Momentarily, a pretty scene appeared at the end of the long garden path; Mrs Bolsover, a slight little woman, aproned, kissing the bride under a porch of

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clématia, while her sisters and Darbyshire stood about them. Mr Bolsover bustled up and kissed his wife.

"Well, Polly? Busy as a big hotel, eh?" he said airily. "Allow me to introduce Mr Watson. Mr Watson, my wife. You may leave Mr Watson to me; we understand each other very well, I believe," and he winked in the act of hanging up his hat. Mrs Bolsover, offering Enoch a thin, cool hand after a frank look of welcome and quick scrutiny, was a homely and ladylike person, with full blue eyes and some marks of care upon her. One divined that the colour in her cheeks might be an effect of the day's excitement.

Mr Bolsover's behaviour when Jack made allusion to the pelting in presence of his younger daughters showed him anxious for the maintenance of paternal dignity. He made big eyes, imperceptibly shaking his head, and with an air benignly prim said to them, "Well, my dears, so you're not going to change the pretty frocks yet." Amid the chatter an elder brother presently showed himself, who was introduced as "My son Tom, son and heir"—a melancholy long-nosed youth with a dirty complexion and nervous manners. Then an uncle and aunt of the bride came in from the church—Mr and Mrs Richard Thornley. The husband was a spectacled and very happy-looking man of insignificant appearance, the wife a picture of health on a large scale. She gave her cheek to Mr Bolsover and took Darbyshire by the shoulders to turn him towards the window with a cry of "Let me have a look at him," and then she pronounced, "Yes, he'll do. Quite handsome, and very like our John at his age. I'm your Aunt Betty, remember," she said, "so give me a kiss and let's be friends. Where's Minnie? I want to see her before she gets out of her things."

She bustled away, calling up the stairs in a big

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contralto, "Minnie! Minnie! Don't take your dress off. I must have another look at you;" suggesting Macdonald's wife grown matronly.

But the breakfast was by this time ready, and the bride came down in her travelling dress. Also the last guest arrived, in the person of a bosom friend of Mr Bolsover's.

This was a wine-merchant's well-matured traveller, tall, thin and bald, with a high colour and a most mellifluous utterance. He took on a shade of Mr Bolsover's dignity in greeting him, but not so as to check the high-voiced fluency of his disconnected talk; and though it was but the third hour of the day, when, as we have it on the best authority, men are sober of custom, he brought a wonderful aroma of sweet wines with him. His name, it appeared, was Fox.

"How-dy-do, Paul?" he said. "Hope I'm not late. How-dy-do, Miss—er—Mrs—Gad, you look bewitching, don't she, Paul? Wish much happiness, I'm sure. How-dy-do, gentlemen, girls? I say, I'm shocking old reprobate; overslept myself. Momentous occasion, no excuse; never mind, my dears. Wedding go off all ri'? Ah, well! . . . Paul, I'm getting an old man; we're both getting old men; 's no use."

"Nonsense, John," poohed Mr Bolsover, firmly, and so with affection pushed him toward the dining-room.

Thither all the company moved without order, waiting for each other politely at the doors with smiles and murmured "After you's," and little protests and disputes. Mr Fox, on a sudden, blocked the passage, insisting that the bride and bridegroom should go first.

"No," they heard him say; "no, Paul. You allow John Fox. Mr Darbyshire, bring your good lady. . . . Charming! . . . Paul, I'm forlorn old bachelor, aint I?"

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"Pooh!" said Mr Bolsover again. "I don't think so;" and indeed Mr John Fox sat down to table with quite a cheerful air, looking, at the worst, a little cold and shaky. Besides, he was dressed carefully. He wore a wisp of black hair carried over the top of his head, a very large white tie with a gold clasp, a flowered yellow waistcoat, and the black frock coat of a blameless life.

Mr Bolsover stood before a large pie, glanced round the table like a man who puffs his cheeks before jumping off a diving-board, looked grave, and said to him, with a nice blend of urbanity and grave unction,—

"John, will you say grace?"

Mr Fox did so as if it were a fashionable accomplishment. He even hummed a snatch of music after it, filling himself dexterously a glass of sherry, and another glass for his friend. Mrs Thornley, who sat at his elbow, was distinctly seen to smile at Mrs Bolsover. But she turned to Enoch on the other side of her, and whispered that Mr Fox was the vicar's warden, an invaluable man.

A merry chatter began at once. While Darbyshire opened the champagne, Mrs Bolsover poured coffee and Mr Thornley carved the chickens. Enoch had Miss Clara Bolsover on his right; but Mrs Thornley's voice prevailed over hers, rallying Mr John Fox upon his bachelordom.

"I'm afraid you are hopeless, Mr Fox."

"Eh? I beg your pardon. How d'y'mean, madam?"

"Oh, to oversleep yourself at a wedding. Have you given up *all* hope?"

"Bless my soul, my dear Mrs—er— Take a glass sherry!" Mr Fox appeared to realise, with a certain flurry of the mind, what he had to face.

"You know very well I never drink sherry; and I think I shall give you my opinion of bachelors."

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"Spare me, pray!" he cried with a start. "Paul, defend me. You know what I suffer, old friend; life blighted. I believe Mrs—your esteemed sister-'n-law—I believe, 'pon my soul, she'd have me marry my landlady to-morrow—woman that comes 'n' talks to me like a wet blanket when I want to eat anything."

"Turn her out," said Mr Bolsover promptly, engaged with the pie.

"My dear Paul, 's much as my life's worth."

Mrs Thornley laughed out. "You've been deceiving the poor thing," she said.

"Mrs Thornley, I 'sure you I never said—I assure you I daren't ask that woman darn a pair socks; sh—shows such unne'ss'ry satisfaction. I have to leave 'm in railway carriages and places."

"Oh, you artful creature!" cried Mrs Thornley, and broke into peals of laughter.

"Mrs Thornley, you've no idea. She bought me a foot-warmer. 'Pon my soul, there seventeen antim'cassars in my lil room, some on buffets."

Darbyshire laughed loudest, remembering his musical-box.

"And yet you don't marry her!" said the lady. "Oh, this is tragical!"

"Tragical! It's a depraved nature, Paul; you've seen it. Paul has to take me home from club—if we're a lil later than usual—to prevent her crying."

Mrs Thornley cried "Oh!" at the revelation, pretending to cover her face; and Mr Bolsover paused with a piece of pie crust between the knife and fork, and looked at his friend wisely.

"John," he said, "I fancy you're not quite *savvan fair* this morning. Have some chicken."

The vicar's warden sat upright with a submissive look of quick anxiety. "Eh? Yes, to be sure, Paul," he

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said. "Of course Mrs—er—understands me; Christmas and times like that, once a year. Club fellows have what they call smoking concerts."

Enoch was half absolved from the duty of attention to Miss Bolsover by this entertaining old gentleman. True, they had some asides and little laughs of their own, Miss Bolsover being quietly witty. But even his interest in the droll aspect of Mr Fox's vinous respectability (and her father's most respectable solemnity) was felt, in the main, through the mind of the bride. He watched the play of her face.

He saw her now for the first time with undazzled and tranquil eyes, and was so glad of her for love of his friend that she gave him as high a delight as any he had felt in Barbara. She blushed a little for the old man's artlessness, taking courage to smile at it from Darbyshire, who had begun to abet Mrs Thornley; and her clear and pretty features were animated by this diversion, while in every lull of the merriment they softened with a quiet pride of happiness that drew her eyes continually to meet her husband's. When Enoch saw that softer look, all the joviality sounded in his ears with no more meaning than the wind has. Love glowed so purely in it that he had a thrill of reverence, and there whispered in his mind's ear the miraculous voice, "Draw not nigh hither. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." He had quailed more or less at the prospect of making a set speech, and he had nothing in mind to say: he now took his courage in hand, forgetting himself in that emotion, which brought a shimmering mist of joy before his eyes. When the time came they should know how glad he was of their happiness—though his own was ended.

Meantime, Mr Bolsover was laughing again in a most infectious manner at nothing but the piece of

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bread beside his plate. The ruddy face of his crony, in whimsical contrast, expressed a half-pathetic anxiety to share the fun. Mr Bolsover's explanation did not enlighten him. Mr Bolsover lifted the piece of bread and hit the table with it.

"If I'd shied piece o' crummy loaf," he said, between two loud crows, "might have killed him!"

It looked as if the recollection would last him all day. He sat back in his chair and laughed on the steady falsetto note of the merry, little, fat, grey man in the song. So long as he did not try to interrupt this good laugh with speech, it seemed to come as easy as breathing, and he kept a look of fresh surprise through it.

Mr Fox cast an anxious glance about him to see if anyone else understood it, and, overlooking Enoch, returned to his champagne rather mournfully. If Paul was laughing at him, he seemed to muse, it was bad taste and not very friendly. Perhaps, even, he began to reckon up bitterly the times he had seen his friend "right," and to wilt a little in the wintry wind of man's ingratitude. He was heard to sniff. His pitiful thin fingers played with the stem of his glass; and when Mr Bolsover hit him on the back he had a shock of evident pain.

Unmistakeably Paul was laughing at him now—laughing in his face, hilarious.

"Laugh, you old sinner!" crowed Mr Bolsover. "Nobody knows but me and Mr Watson what we're laughing at. Funniest thing. Tell you afterwards." Between these ejaculated phrases he nodded incitements.

Mr Fox glanced round again, caught a reflection of his own misgiving in the wistful look of Mrs Bolsover, fixed his eyes on Darbyshire, and was visibly cheered. His mouth came open with a show of agreeable expectancy; he smoothed his chin. When he had considered

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Mr Bolsover again, a high and happy cachinnation broke from him quite suddenly over every other sound. He got up from his chair and leaned across the corner of the table, staring down on Mr Bolsover's portly, swaying figure. He put out a hand and rubbed Mr Bolsover's head; and falling back in his chair, waved his napkin with a gesture of limp approval, subsiding, by shortened cackles, to a tearful and solemn bewilderment.

Thereupon Mr Bolsover said instantly, with a face of composure and self-assurance, "John, you've had too much champagne," and filled his friend's glass. They were as good as a play.

Now, custom decrees that at the liveliest of wedding breakfasts, just as at farewell dinners, there shall be speeches. So they came to the speeches, and composed themselves in a good humour when Enoch, nervous after all with the responsibility of choosing the right moment, stood up to give the health of the bride and bridegroom. What he said he could not afterwards recall, except to know that he had tried to tell them what a good fellow Darbyshire was, and that Mr Bolsover had said as he sat down, "Hear, hear! Most seasonable," which ridiculous commendation did not cheer him. When he emerged from the sense of failure that covered him like a cloud, Mr John Fox was on his feet, talking copiously. It was a relief to listen to him.

"My old friend Paul's eldes' daughter," he said, finishing some sentence gracefully. "So I said to him, 'Paul, I shall be there. It's one of those occasions'—er—I expressed myself proud, I may say. I'm just an ol' bachelor, but I'm proud for my ol' friend Paul's sake, an' my respected, dear friend, Mrs Bolsover's." He turned from one to the other with a courtly bow. "Paul should thank God for dutiful daughters. I was

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best man at my old friend's wedding, seems only yesterday; an' now he's father of a happy fam'ly, sittin' under his own vine fig-tree; whatsoever he doeth sh'll prosper. . . . We have much to be thankful for. Things come to pass. . . . We had many jaunts together when we were boys, and now we sit at the same table and make merry."

Mr Fox's voice sank half a tone, and he was affected to the point of emotion.

"Merry occasion for our young friends. God bless them! I've watched them since they were tiny toddlers. Good girls. An' now Miss Minnie's married to fine manly-looking young fellow, handsome as a picture, in career of literature. 'M sure he deserves all 't has been said of him. Means to do well by her. . . . Here am I withering on the virgin thorn, so to speak, nothing to look forward to." He paused and blew his nose. "I felicitate him 'th all my heart, because I know Miss Minnie; once was my lil sweetheart. Used sit on my knee an' ask me 'bout three bears. Eh? You've forgotten that, young lady. Not? Well, well; very good of you to remember. Never mind me. You've always a good friend and well-wisher in old John Fox—always good friend and well-wisher. I think there's nothing else, Paul. I wish bride and bridegroom much happiness. God bless them. . . . Bless all of us."

Mr Bolsover said, "Thanks, old friend," and grasped the hand of Mr Fox nearest him on the table. Mrs Bolsover's eyes were full, and so were Darbyshire's; the good heart of this feverish old toper spoke with such simplicity through his eccentric manner.

Mr Paul Bolsover rose under the inspiration of it and coughed. It may be said without great extravagance that thereupon the room expanded, and that many more people sat around the table. Mr Bolsover was equal

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to the task of impressing them. He was sure they would appreciate the emotions of a father. Having said so, he took his taut little figure between appeasing hands at the region of its greatest circumference, gazed far and wide about, and pulled his waistcoat down. He raised his voice. They were, he said, met in circumstances when—when—er—they were met in happy circumstances. Of course, he added, qualified. It had been his momentous duty that day to tender to his respected son-in-law, Mr Darbyshire, a ray of sunshine. A flower from the rose garden.

But Mr Bolsover paused, so to say, in the act of taking flight, and gazed with surprise upon his melancholy son. To the dismay of the company this unfortunate boy, betrayed by his one glass of champagne into a fit of silent laughter like a caricature of his father's, remained for a time unconscious of the gaze. He was nudged in vain by the youngest Miss Bolsover, demurely.

"Tom!" said Mr Bolsover, loftily.

The son and heir was frightened.

"You forget yourself," said Mr Bolsover.

Mrs Thornley quietly interposed. "Oh, let the boy alone, Paul. It's a poor heart that never rejoices."

Mr Bolsover coughed again, and so resumed. He had lost a listener, for Enoch fell to commiserating the lad, with an uneasy thought for the problem of heredity. He said that he made the surrender of this fair flower from a sense of duty—duty to the human family. Watching his wife's eyes, he repeated—with a certain loss of confidence—duty to the human family. "My dear wife," he said wistfully, "joins in the sacrifice. We have said to my friend Darbyshire, 'Take her. Make her happy.' He has given me his word like a gentleman, which he is. We believe him."

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Mrs Bolsover smiled through tearful eyes at her daughter, who now was grave and pale.

"I say we believe him," the little man continued firmly. "Consequently Minnie becomes a woman; and in the space of a brief hour she bids—er—she quits the shelter of the nest. Fledged. Of course Nature abhors a vacuum, in spite of unavoidable happy circumstances. 'We shall meet, but we shall miss her,' as the old song so touchingly and—and seasonably—er—touchingly expresses. A vacuum." Mr Bolsover may be said to have looked the word. "Still," he added, "it *was* a vacant chair! Course of Nature. Minnie, my girl, your father says 'Good-bye, my child. Remember, whatever happens there is a home for you.' Jack!—I call you Jack from now for the future. Mr Darbyshire, I'm proud to have you for a son-in-law! We're all proud. If my friend Mr Watson will let me do so, I raise my paternal glass. All standing. Thank you. The bride and bridegroom! Hipipip, hooray! Hipipip, hooray! Hipipip, hooray! Mr Darbyshire, my respects, sir."

There was much enthusiasm; the talk and merriment broke out afresh for a moment, and while the bride and her mother wiped away their tears, and the bridesmaids blinked happily, Mr Bolsover sat down beaming. He touched glasses with his old friend.

Darbyshire spoke very well, turning for the most part toward the placid mother. His sensitive blue eyes looked a little over the heads of the circle, or down upon the table. He said he should feel quite guilty if he were not sure that they forgave him. He knew what a treasure he was taking. It was the honour of his life to win her; he would not think any better of himself if he could shine once a year in the Queen's Birthday List. "Of course, if I could work it," he said,

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with a flicker of his accustomed humour, "Lady Darbyshire should have a page of Debrett among the Peerages. If she says the word, I shall do my little best. Might get on the Debrett staff and pop it in myself. But of course, she's really far better pleased with all the kind things said of her this morning; so am I, and glad of the duty to thank you all on her behalf. Of course," he faltered, "I can't say much; talking is a poor acknowledgment in my position, isn't it? Besides, I know she has deserved them all. As for the kind things said of me—my business to live up to them, best of my ability. They make me serious. However, I've got a little wife to help me. . . ." He laid his hand on his wife's shoulder, glancing down at her, said "Thank you all very much," and so finished abruptly.

Afterwards, in the drawing-room, Enoch watched the lovers from a corner seat while the Misses Bolsover, at a loud pianoforte, left him otherwise unoccupied. Mrs Thornley surprised him with a smile; she too had eyes.

It was pretty to see the young wife conning her husband's face when his head was turned; her content of admiration as she sat hand in hand with him showed so candidly. One saw her eyes run over the clear outline of his face, look at the way his hair was brushed, study the convolutions of the small ear, the firm set of his head. The woman appeared in her for all she looked so slight and girlish by his side; she had entered on possession. As for Darbyshire, his nervousness being gone he was his charming self again, with ready and natural praise for the music, a special tenderness of manner toward Mrs Bolsover, and, for the breezy Mrs Thornley when she bantered him, a lively retribution of wit. It was by moments only, and almost gravely, that he spoke to the quiet and sweet companion who waited now to be taken away by him.

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Their going made a sudden commotion. Holding back from the leavetaking, Enoch saw the bride kiss her tremulous good-byes, caught his breath at the sobbing of mother and sisters, and, with a sensation as if time stood still thereupon, watched the flutter of a handkerchief at the window of the cab driven off.

With that he was a stranger in the Bolsover household. He took his own leave immediately, meeting kindly protests with a hurried plea of some necessity of getting back to Merchanton.

CHAPTER XXXI

ENOCH WATSON TAKES ACCOUNT

THE spectacle of his friend's happiness being ended, Enoch had been sharply and unexpectedly cast back upon a sense of his own irreclaimable loss.

It came quite home to him for the first time. In making his excuses for a sudden departure and smiling his good-byes, he was the man whose soul is suddenly required of him and who has yet to play a part; and out of doors in the sunlight, all that sustained him under a shock to his central courage was the necessity of finding his way to the railway station. He fought against blindness and weak limbs, which threatened to make him a gazing-stock. On the platform he stood with some of the heat of life gone out, heedless and shivering.

An intensity of grief stuns us, and he was not thinking consciously of Barbara. She had come into his mind with the first flood of dismay as having once been dearly known to him; but the thought of her had struck no more compunction than it would have done if she had been lost by death instead of mere relinquishment. His trouble was vague. He had no better understanding of it than to try to put Darbyshire out of his mind, as if it were surrendering his friend that had broken him. And the effort won him instantly some self-control to look about and to breathe the air. He saw people on the platform with him, and, bethinking himself, went to the booking-office for a ticket. He also bought some newspapers.

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In a carriage alone he forgot to look at them, resuming as a pleasant thought his recollection of the bride's behaviour. He could have smiled at his distress in the parting. The truth was, that he would be content never to see Jack again if so he gave him up to such a dear companion.

Fancy, quickening in his hypersensitive mood, beguiled him for a space with visions of the honeymoon leading on to stored years. His view of marriage—of an ideal marriage like Darbyshire's—pictured it a state of extraordinary bliss, of enduring rapture; he conceived that the happy pair were not simply lifted into ecstasy, but endued with a virtue of remaining for the rest of time at that fine pitch. Imagination soared up to it, scorning the poor notion of a fast and pure friendship, the strength of love to endure large sorrows as well as higher joys. Their sky was to be a sky without clouds, their seasons all harvest, their only occupation rapt endearment. That conception was proportioned to the emotional measure of his own forfeit.

Dwelling on it brought, however, a saner thought. He pictured Jack very gentle and proud with his children, and of an extraordinary courage to fend for them a start in life. Indeed, he fell in readily with Jack's enthusiasm, for they were fine youngsters—how could such a love-match of rare natures fail?—bright girls, bold boys, with Darbyshire's pluck and wit and the kindliness of mother and father both. It would work—the fine Darbyshire leaven; and imagination reached forward and down the line of children's children with a half mystical exultation.

So Enoch Watson, generous-hearted, entered deeply into the happiness of his friend, and felt no more that day of his own bereavement.

All was right with the world. He walked into

Enoch Watson takes Account

Merchanton with a certain pride of manhood at his heart, and admired the destiny of mankind. The covered market-hall, with its warmth and light, attracted him. Crowded with working folk, it was yet much quieter than an open arcade: crying of wares is not permitted there, and the rustle and hum of a ceaseless, cheerful movement through its crossing avenues resembled silence as he entered from the roaring street.

None but happy faces were about him, passing slowly, mingling; healthy faces of the young, careworn serene faces of mothers, earnest faces of the pleasant shopwomen, faces of men in the restful mood of Saturday nights, with a week's work done and a week's wage earned manfully. This textile town was then, it is true, in a slow backwater of trade, with old big firms continually stranding; he remembered its plight only to marvel without misgiving at the gradely fortitude of human nature as he saw it in these Yorkshire workers. They were not ill-dressed, being thrifty; they were clean, menseful, quiet of speech, calmly humorous, and the place was aglow with warmth and light. He moved among them aimlessly, wishing good for them, and vaguely thinking that hard times and even poverty might be a means both to soften and to make men strong of heart. Life was at all events a great thing, quietly defying all chances; and to be a man, conscious of chance and yet not daunted, joyfully taking life in his hand as Darbyshire did, and all these did, was heroic and fine, the more so because nobody thought about it. Darbyshire's good marriage and all that was to come of it were Enoch's reverie upon his pillow, and gave him sleep.

Nevertheless he awoke on Sunday morning with a boding sense of defeat and emptiness. Dressing, he

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referred it very wisely to the fact that he had nothing to do. The wisdom is evident in the postponement of his *ennui* by the simple functions of dressing and breakfasting.

There was a letter for him with the Sheepton post-mark, reminding him that this was his twenty-second birthday. He read it with a dull apprehension of the contents :—

“MY DEAR BOY,—You will be thinking of your Home, this being the first Birthday you have spent away from it, and I am sending you a small parcel of useful things to show that your Father and I do not forget our only son gone out into the World. We are happy to know that you are succeeding in business, and only hope that you still increase in Wisdom and spiritual stature, and in favour with God and Man. You will let your old Mother say just this, while she wishes you Many Happy Returns of a day that has always been precious in memory. She cannot put her thoughts in words like her clever Boy, but he knows how we long for his happiness ; and ‘What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own Soul!’ Ah, you know the text, Enoch. Do not forget it. Your Father would have written but this is his busy day ; he sends his love and hopes to see you soon for a week-end and a breezy walk on Crookrise. I am thankful to say we both keep well, except that I get older and soon tire now ; but that is to be expected.—Your loving Mother,

“MARY WATSON.”

Sad is your case, O trustful company of mothers out of touch with your sons, and saddest if you are pious—

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minded, daring timorously to exhort them at the risk of a deepening estrangement.

Enoch Watson glanced through his letter alert for the expected exhortations, lest they should fret him; and its effect, in the humour it touched upon, was just some vague addition of weariness. He put it in his pocket, deferring reply as a task.

CHAPTER XXXII

GLIMPSES OF UNKNOWN MISCHIEF

WHAT of Barbara West so long? With Enoch all went very well, and he was not her keeper. Neither love nor friendship made him that; for love implies no trust but as it is requited, and friendship love had made impossible. Still to the chivalric conscience love is tyrannous. What, indeed, may not a lover feel if his one-time lady fall in a snare from which, with manlier strength, he might have saved her?

Time enough had passed to draw a snare about her. Beset by a wooer cunningly mild, with little other thought of her at first than of his proper womankind less dainty, Barbara was always duped. Mr Prince Varley pressed her hard; and if now she was wary of the fire in her blood, Barbara pitied his pose of a suppliant and contrite worshipper. His despair was dreadful, she had to think. For it appeared that, for some pathetic cause, *he* could not marry; and passion was killing him, passion she inspired and cruelly mistrusted. He would rather die than do her harm, he said once, but he thought he should die in fact because she disbelieved him; and, having said so, the hypocrite grown earnest made a daily tale of his sufferings. This was distressing; and, strange fact, it was offered with a gathering sincerity by way of homage, being indeed the only homage such a man can pay. He came to say that love was a curse; a man might shoot himself to be free of it—but for the thought of her.

That he was pleading for anything heinous, desiring

Glimpses of Unknown Mischief

any sacrilege, had no thought of reverence for the miracle of creation great and new as it was in the beginning, Barbara did not conceive. Her struggle to shake him off was self-defensive merely. In the brave defence she made, patience, tact, resourceful wits and a stubborn will were all unequally engaged at close quarters with a kind of monomaniac.

When patience failed, and he saw the stubbornness, Mr Prince Varley grew enraged with her and was missing for certain days, while she lived in sick terror from the vapouring hints of suicide. He came back to her with a lap-dog's looks, and she had to think herself the cause of his tragical white face, with the big tears oddly rolling down while he talked submissively, calling himself a brute and her an angel. She was never so much in a mind to yield as when he came to her so.

The fire that Barbara had played with leaped in flames about her. There came a morning when, in the instant of waking, she saw herself in some such scene of over-night, and with a conviction of weakness suddenly felt came fright; fright which, in a nature so self-centred and firm as Barbara's, amounted to panic. She slid out of bed in a fevered maze. Presently she began to dress with clumsy fingers and hurried out unbreakfasted, on an impulse to cast herself for safety into Enoch Watson's arms, crying, "Don't let that man get me, Con." The panic carried her almost to his lodgings before she reflected that at this time of day he would be sleeping. Then she rallied a cold heart, and had to look for some sort of breakfast in town. Her mind was made up over it; there seemed to be only one way—she would tell her poor silly Prince that they must not see each other again.

Before and after this, events befel which at one time would have quickened Enoch's sense of her peril. He

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saw her driving with Varley through a street of Merchanton, admired in a dashing turn-out; and the apparition stunned him. He had to assure himself that Barbara wilfully made the choice he had thrust upon her; but the humiliation of this idea was profound. As they passed she was for the moment looking superbly content, and Mr Varley bent towards her with what in Enoch's eyes was an air of indulgent proprietorship.

Pondering on Varley and on Paine—who was to die in a public hospital next year—he said to Darbyshire some days after, "I can't make out why men are allowed in this world to do so much harm."

Darbyshire's eyes opened, but he humoured his friend. "Same chance to do good," he said.

"If the good went as far as the harm—"

"Blow me tight," cried Jack, as he hesitated, "better come with me for a crawl, young Watson. You've got 'em bad. Come for a crawl, and to-night take a blue pill."

Enoch laughed off his discomposure and went.

They chanced in the course of this airing to pass Barbara in one of the principal streets. She was crossing to the other side when Darbyshire caught sight of her, saying below his breath, "Hullo! There's Barbara. She doesn't see us." A moment later she had glanced aside, smiled brightly, and bowed; but in doing so she perceptibly hastened on, and they scarcely encountered her eyes at all. It was evident that she had seen them before crossing; perhaps had crossed in order to avoid them.

Enoch was agitated, though he kept a good face on it.

"See the queenly grace!" murmured Jack, not looking at him. "My goodness! bewitching. But any other girl would have cut you slick—cruel. . . . Don't think she looks very well, though."

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"Not well?" queried Enoch.

They did not discuss her, some interruption occurring. His own impression of it had only been that she looked a shade less the girl and more the woman, but in the best of health as she always found herself. What troubled him was, that she had passed Darbyshire presumably on his account. However, he could suppose the marriage not yet known to her, and turn off the incident with a mention of that probability. For that time all the further talk of her between them was a little castle-building on Jack's part.

"Barbara's getting on," said he, with conviction. "Soon be floating off to London, Crystal Palace and swell drawing-rooms. Just made for it. Hold her own, my boy, and won't lose her head not a little bit."

In the months that followed on to Christmas Enoch's thoughts of her were fading clouds, with that estimate and prophecy for something of a silver lining. But, to begin with, he had found a pugilist to give him lessons at eighteenpence an hour—a light-weight of sullen and pasty countenance, whom he visited twice a week in the upper room of a back street public-house. He suffered with fortitude the breathless mortifications of a novice in the noble art, because he still dreamed of a chance meeting with Varley. Also he denied himself the late hours with Macdonald and Penny, blaming those, no doubt with partial reason, as the cause of his amazing weakness when hit in the region of the stomach, and of a certain nervousness at first in face of the lively adversary.

His reward for all this was a cheerful state of mind, with forgetfulness for the most part of grave problems precociously considered. He had his boy's health again. When he attained sufficient nerve and quickness to counter on the pasty face now and then, his pleasure in

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going about Merchanton was much enhanced. He kept a sprightly outlook for adventure. Moreover, he did his desk work with a will, ignoring Mr Alderman Smith. But his rival having one day passed him by with no behaviour more provocative than a certain elateness, he saw that, in any encounter, he would have to be again the aggressor; and for that his grudge was inadequate. The boxing lessons were dropped, and the pasty-faced youth represented very libellously that Watson did not like hard hitting.

At Christmas Enoch went to Sheepton for a week-end.

When he reflected that in nine months he had only once been at home, that visit was imperative. The fact struck a pang of self-reproach. He shrank, it is true, from a Sheepton Sunday, the two-hours-long sermons with their doleful fervour of infatuation, the necessity of wearing a mask. For to show his true mind was still impossible. The antique faith of his father and mother was sacred to him; it contained their happiness, their very life; and the idea of parricide had the same aspect for him as that of an attempt at self-justification which might perplex them. To make himself so much as understood, he must bring them to share his heresy. No, the estrangement had to be accepted; he must go, and conform, and make up to them a little of his shameful undeliberate neglect.

An extraordinary gladness uplifted him at the thought of buying presents. He could give them pleasure, at any rate.

He reckoned up his savings. After paying his landlady and putting apart five shillings for the railway fare he would have £7, 5s. 9d. to spend from. It was not a fortune; since he broke with Barbara there had been certain bills to pay, and among them one for Darbyshire's wedding gift (as handsome as he could make it without

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delaying too long); but even with £7, 5s. 9d. he had emotions in finding out how far that sum would go among the sumptuous December shops. Spending all you have upon others, if it suffice for that use, is a way to reconcile yourself to its not being more; and the others in this case were a father and mother who, as memories of the thrifty home instructed Enoch, had grudged nothing for his education and start in life. Thinking of what he owed to them, he had it like a revelation that he owed them everything. His apathy seemed not only shameful, but strange: he could not account for it.

But in a gradely carriageful of country folk he found Christmas and the sound of home suddenly about him; free talk and hearty, infused with the kindest humour, went among them on a note of neighbourliness and the pride of simple manhood, and it warmed him like the freemasonry that such intercourse of a common stock resembles. His confident good cheer of the Saturday market-night returned. When the come-and-go traffic of intermediate stations left him at last alone, he sat expectant, pleasantly excited, thinking of his presents and a way to smuggle them into the house. At all events he would surprise the household, coming unannounced. Then, at a picture of the welcome he would have, sharply the prodigal's bitter speech ran in his head, starting tears that he brushed away: "Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants." Something of that extreme humility fitted his case, so sure he was of his greeting.

Sheepton station, and it seemed to him years ago that he saw it last. Out, with his parcels. Christmas was two days past, yet they were still chorusing "Christians, awake!" in one carriage of the train.

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A man said to him, with deliberate judgment, "Now, there's gooize an' puddin' i' that!"—an expression of the Yorkshire faith in hard eating that sounded seasonable. He seemed to see goose and pudding in the comfortable air of most passengers; they had lately risen regenerate from the vulgar grace pronounced in Yorkshire after meat, a pat on the pacified stomach and one word—"Theere!"—as of a duty accomplished for all time. The train's departure left an extraordinary calm, in contrast with Merchanton; and whereas he had come from dirty streets, here it was dry clean frost, and heartsome. He could breathe. A country sense of leisure attuned him to humorous observation of the quaint look of things. There was a touching air of unskilfulness well meant, a kind of hobbledehoy gaiety like paper favours on a May-day cart-horse, in the early decorative style of shop windows—the alternate apple and orange against the sills, dispreed as it were for a modest effect; a limp string of magenta-pink roses at the chemist's; little stiff triumphal flags cockading cuts of bacon. He could smile at these, pleased with the simple wish to please; but the old "Methody Chapel," a plain cubical shell of stone with square windows, had no sentiment to cast a kindly glamour on its ugliness. Being a reminder of the morrow, it almost put him out of humour. The street broadens out, for Shepton, spacioulsly; and a Norman castle dominates it from higher ground, with the ambitious motto, "Desormais," in stone letters against the sky between its gate-towers. That, he thought, looked English, of a piece with the goose and pudding; and Shepton for the home-comer bore itself with a staunch good humour.

Slyly, like a practical joker, he entered his father's house by the front door. The house belonged to an

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order of domestic architecture in which the entrance hall is wanting; the front door opens into a best room, and, normally, you go in by the back way to the "living-room," which is a breakfast-dining-room and kitchen all in one—the heart of the house. Now, to-day the best room had a fire burning, sign of company entertained; and he heard an occasional chink of knife-and-fork play while bestowing his parcels. They were at a late dinner—all in good time!

His quiet appearing made a fine flutter at the table, where the old folk were feasting with an uncle and aunt and one of his cousins, a girl who had bloomed unrecognisably into womanhood since the days when he romped with her. The welcome was even more than he had looked for—his name cried out in all tones of gladness, the quiet mother tremulous when he kissed her, and his father grasping hands with a "Well, my lad! Just in time," that made no account at all of long absence; while his uncle dealt him a great blow on the back and the girl's good face of country health was alight with pleasure. He had a fleeting sense of something amiss in the other thoughts of home he had nursed. How did this heartiness accord with the kind of piety repelling him?

That was the last of shadow. He sat down to the table-cheer, laughing open-throated like the rest at his uncle's sallies, relishing known flavours of the Christmas fare (none like his mother's), and feeling that it was a great thing to be at home. Merchanton, when after a time they questioned him about his life there, came to mind like a place in another country, where thought and feeling had been alienised; he answered with an odd sensation of reporting upon another self, whose external fortunes he had to take some credit for while doubting him. In after years he

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likened himself—this other self of Merchanton—to a tuft of grass floating cockahoop on a stream and much distracted by its eddies; not at all in the way to thrive, being rootless. Even now, in a pause of the talk, he found himself wishing he might have taken root in Sheepton—wishing the place had been less an intellectual pinfold, more the open windy hill-side—because of the warm hearts that sunned him there. He was too young to be aware that a man's courage could make it so.

However, that bravery of high spirits which is courage in the young lifted him clean above self-consciousness. Positively he was witty, quick to feel and think in the mood of those about him; and what pleasure his gifts bestowed! There was a set of furs for his mother, and a big meerschaum pipe for his father, both immoderately admired. He had his cousin Ellen out skating. With what a light heart he enjoyed that sport, going the long roll of the outside edge with her! The boy felt a pride in her fine good looks, liked her plain talk and musical ready laugh, was braced as much, no doubt, by the contact of her splendid health as by the winter air. Now and again he gladly spoke with an acquaintance, forgotten until the face appeared. And in doffing his skates, well breathed, Enoch had another sharp perception of the contrast between such hearty life in touch with Nature and the unexpansive petty life of towns to which he was committed. Committed, yes. But not to a petted girl's caprice, thank goodness!—and Barbara was dismissed with a fling of the skates over his shoulder.

The two were at home again with appetites for mince-pie and cake by six o'clock, and drank hugely of weak tea with the viands. Yorkshire fashion, the seniors egged them on to fare sumptuously. It has to be confessed that in Yorkshire there survives too lustily a

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Viking zeal for the belly, so that at table there is more teetotalism than temperance. But in any case it was Christmas, which comes but once a year. "Come, another happy month! They're little uns. Ye willn't? Well—it's grand cake—cut 'em a slice of cake apiece, and then they'll happen fancy a mince-pie at-after. Plenty of water in that kettle! Take a walk round; ye can never tell how much room there is! Take a walk round and let stuff settle!" These were the gross encouragements of Uncle Lot.

That standing dish, "The Messiah," came in for their evening's entertainment. Enoch had still money left to pay for the whole party. His reward, however, was less their satisfaction or the music than to sit by his cousin and share a playful bag of sweets with her, that lay in her lap to let him think he stole them.

Yet the music was good. With its own famous chorus and with soloists from the dales round about, Sheepton, by a novel stroke of enterprise (much debated), had reinforced a local orchestra with "foreign talent." You jump at once, good reader, to the situation. Foreign talent did not mean in this case German instrumentalists, but a first and second violin and one cornet hired from larger towns; yet, where every household proudly owned a member of the orchestra, enterprise of that sort could have but doubtful credit. Little had been heard for a month but wistful dogmatism and vaticination—still in the air for Handel's soothing overture to exorcise. The mischief came, you are to understand, of wanting to be fine last year—bringing in a Merchanton conductor, who had forced it on the oratorio committee with a threat of throwing up his job. There was the innovation plain to be seen—a lady violinist!—in whom Enoch, with a tremor, discovered some general likeness to

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Barbara West. The common emotion was expressed by Uncle Lot, who spoke out for all ears.

"Well, that caps all!" he said. "Hae yo' seen? First fiddle's a woman."

Enoch put him to silence with an airy "Oh, that! That's nothing new." The exclamation had reflected on Barbara also.

Humbly subsiding, the excellent uncle left him to regret that superciliousness. Where Enoch sat, the back of her shoulder turned towards him had Barbara's graceful fall; and had she not been slim, with a paler ear, and neck, and forearm, he might have excited himself by wondering if this were actually she. His eyes were often upon her, an exquisite figure in pale green silk, with a jet necklet and bracelets. He fell to thinking how much Barbara would have looked sweeter, gracefuller, especially with the hair drawn up in that attractive style from the neck—a new fashion.

Her way of handling the silk handkerchief and putting the fiddle to her chin awoke a suspicion in him; of turning the leaves too. The conductor spoke to her once, between the numbers, with a manner so suitable to Barbara's character that—

Surely she was older, and taller, this lady. But the suspicion grew to urgent uneasiness. When she put up a hand to her hair once, he was almost satisfied: at a half turn of her head, showing more of the profile, he fell into perplexity.

He saw Barbara's face after the second interval, as she came upon the platform; and he was startled by the change that four months had made in her. The mouth had lost its look of pleasant satisfaction—the doll's look, as he called it. She was, or had been, ill, he thought; and it struck him as very unlike her not to glance about among the audience. He put away the

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notion that she feared to see him there (she must have had some thoughts of him in coming to Sheepton), because that interpretation of her manner was at once insufficient and overweening. With respect to himself he could only infer—and her brother Con was not aware of the hurt to his pride—that she was not extremely anxious to meet him again. Still, he wished she had betrayed a little interest; for the idea that his forsaken friend was unhappy troubled him, and would not be put aside.

No; if he had been able to think himself the cause, Enoch Watson's pulses must have leaped with sudden hope. He knew her too well to entertain delusion. In such a case Barbara would not have left him all this time in doubt.

Curiosity grew strong in him, and would have darkened if he had brooded.

But he did his best, after the oratorio, to behave as if Barbara West had no existence for him; and one consequence was that on the morrow he showed himself out of humour. The good hope of him as a wanderer who might return to the fold, a hope in which the simple father and mother had slept happily, was rudely shaken by seeing him go off on a round of visits instead of to chapel.

The mother's heart yearned to him very grievously, for all the pride of wearing his costly present.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A HOUSE OF COWARDICE

THERE is in Merchanton a street of mean repute, that sags down to the banked-up railway from a road where drays and carts are noisily passing all day long, and the children run bare-footed. At one corner stands a small beer-house, at the other a greengrocer's; and you may infer the poor spirit of the people who live in that quarter from the fact that these establishments have dirty windows. The tradesmen who keep them going doubtless know their business. Avoiding any show of brightness, they appeal the better to that sense of homely squalor which has inspired a northern proverb of the city dregs: "The clartier the cosier." A dingy music-hall neighbours the beerhouse, touting upon the road. It is down this narrow street, which has a special fetor on warm days and many pools of slush throughout the grimy winter, that you approach Hanover Terrace—a few good houses built on a time among fields, and long ago blocked in by the low embankment.

The street is wretched, the terrace sinister. There is but one class of the population whose needs and pretensions can be reconciled by houses of such a size in that environment.

It is a class inviting some of us, for our own extreme abasement in a rascal shame, to ignore much misery out of consideration for lively and gracious manners. In the outward seeming of these houses there is nothing so gay as their denizens. They lack paint. The large doors are scarce distinguishable from their ornamental

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stonework of post and lintel, and look as if they would not open, business being done at the back ; while the sooty brickwork has a tear-stained aspect very woe-begone, due to the constant overflowing of faulty easing-spouts. The windows, it is true, appear marvellously well curtained to all who pass in the trains ; but that is part of their internal decoration, which even more belies the women who live in them. Humid soil in what at first were gardens appears to have been poisoned against the worms ; at most, a little dull green moss grows upon it in sickly patches. The flagged pathways are greener. They are also desperately uneven ; with the heavy steps above them, which cant and dip, sliding away from the unobservant doors, they have a scandalous air of sottishness. An outworn gentility in houses can sink no lower.

Only the last house of the terrace, Number 5, hiding under the lofty wall of a warehouse that ignores it, makes any smug pretence to differ from its neighbours. Or it still did so in 1881.

There were majolica flowerpots on its window sills for plants to perish in ; a double ring of oyster shells and a square border of the same made apology for vanished vegetation ; while the door had a knob and a drooping bell-pull of polished brass. When, under cover of darkness, the other houses commonly grew noisy, this was quiet ; their windows would be all aglow, in these the gas burned dim. But it still burned when they at last were darkened. Number 5 was the gruesomest house in a gruesome row. You might have kept a watch for weeks and yet learned nothing of its mystery. Visitors it had, but at long intervals ; by chance some girl emerged, and she would not return, or a girl approached and entered who did not reappear. And always the door was opened for these entrances

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and exits after nightfall. Hidden alike were the bridled terror in the eyes of her who came and the aimless, pallid face of her who went away.

But, with the other houses, it was to be observed that this one had no dealings. The show of respectability corresponded to some odd sense of it in the tenant's notions. Moreover, of all such visitors—if any were seen—you must have divined that they came as strangers.

Mostly they were girls whom otherwise the terrace would have scared, because of the shame that belongs to it—a shame immeasurably greater than that which they themselves, desiring to escape it, thought less endurable than the obscene machinations of a strange woman and the risk of death in her hands. The shame of the houses was public, hopeless, daily multiplied by common use. Their own was not yet known to more than a few fellow-creatures. To some of them, indeed, it had only come as a black mischance which they had lightly braved, not knowing until now how much they had to dread; others it had stolen upon in the cruel guise of a great happiness they could not put away; but, wronged less or more, they were all in one case, and such is our society that the shame was greater against them than they dared to brave. Death rather. The few that did know of it, being women, appeared to think their desperate avoidance natural, or, being men, put them in the mood for this by great unkindness. It was even suggested to them, with a sham compassion of the cowardliest motive.

In all the sorrow of the world, is there any tragedy like the tragedy of a sweet English girl brought at unawares to this pass? Give me leave to say "at unawares." The thing is possible. She may reach this pass by imperceptible backward steps, her eyes looking

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forward upon a dawn of rosy promise. Or she may walk very warily, and still be taken by surprise. Nature is kindly resolute; the situation of such a girl is only dire because the man is without honour and all the world stands ready to hound her with stones. Pity her at least for the deadly fright, and for a woful knowledge gained of the worthlessness of her seducer. Nay, for the sake of Christian charity, consider if we ought not to keep our stones, as a good rule, for those among us who are readiest to fling them. At least we are sure that if in the mere course of Nature there were sin, which with regard to this matter is a supposition of the most impious, none of us is "without sin," none has the right to lift a finger.

It is not "by results" that we may judge. It can seldom happen in a lifetime that we have in a single case the knowledge requisite for wise judging at all; and then it is, precisely, that none of us dares to judge.

What is sure, with respect to the dire avoidance of our public scorn and stone-throwing in such houses, is that this at all events constitutes a sacrilege greater than churches wot of. It is an attempt upon life, and life is not of human contriving; we have long been agreed to hold it sacred. The smooth-faced hag of Number 5 in that evil terrace may nevertheless be considered as a product of our fixed uncharitableness. This creates her trade. It is responsible for the scandal, and has of late been heard pretending gentleness, in a proposal to soften the law's penalty against both her and her male accomplices. A judge of the High Court has considerably set the law aside.

Into her felonious hands our prudent, very lovable, and simple-minded Barbara was committed in the following March, frantic with trouble and dread.

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Against Mr Prince Varley, who proposed this hideous way of escape to her, she had raged like another woman, surprising him by a force of character immensely greater than his own. Horribly afraid for himself of what distracted her, he had to hear her talk in a wild way that cowed him, because he did not suppose she would "listen to reason." Lest worse should come of it—her voluntary death, perhaps, or an action in the courts for seduction, or an attempt to make him marry her—he put on a face of pathetic injury meant to simulate remorse, and made a virtue of hearing her patiently. His white-livered anxiety was to catch a hint of what she was likely to do, so that he might take his precautions. He soothed her with ghastly terms of endearment which refused to sound natural. For a month, daily, he was under the necessity of listening to aimless reproaches, which his feeble protestations roused to a pitch of tearful frenzy. He was browbeaten and complained to, until, if he had had some courage, he would have shot himself indeed. His continual assurance that it could be "put right" she treated as if he had not spoken; she would give no thought to what should be done, or let him think that anything could be done. Her constant wail was of her music; she could not practise, she would have to cancel her engagements, it was impossible to receive pupils in such a state as her nerves were in. If he talked of "seeing her through it," she cried out that no one could see her through it, her connection was ruined—just when she was doing so well; it was too bad, it was cruel. Stronger words she had no command of, but the repetition of these sufficed. They gave him an abiding sense of meanness, deepening to the callous when he understood at length that her chiding obstinacy, which never changed its note, threatened nothing tragical. It could not last for ever,

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and he was capable of crawling upon his belly as long as she could trample him.

She had fits of crying; not passionate—not even altering her voice, which kept on repeating all kinds of pitiful small considerations—but maddening him because she paid not the faintest attention to his caressing proffers. He had to endure it for fear she would “turn nasty”; but he swore to himself, and supposed that he could keep the oath, never to go near a woman again while he lived.

Ah, but in all this Barbara had not realised her trouble; she had not consciously abandoned hope.

A thing so monstrous in her eyes, so disproportionate and crushing, so definitely fatal to her schemes and terrible in the shame with which it menaced her, was not realisable. She talked on a dreadful “if”; hardening her heart to punish him by concealment of the hope to which, when alone, she clung with all the energy of her stubborn mind. As to her music, he would have heard as much if they had been man and wife. She fought for the hope, clutching at every wonted idea of her life and at the daily look of things as we battle in sleep against impending nightmare. She would not believe in the nightmare as a real event.

She saw it in the light of punishment, and argued that God could not be “so cruelly unjust” as to punish her in that way for failing to be “good”; she had tried so hard and said so many prayers, and the punishment, as she called it, was so much greater than her reluctant sin. Barbara prayed now that it might “be all right”; there were moments of excitement when she had to pray, or she must have screamed. She would rise from her knees and pretend that all *was* right, and try to smile again.

Indoors she could not stay. The busy habit of her

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mind, accustomed to occupy itself with her own concerns only, would not be turned away from this one horrible thing. She said to herself, "That's the way people go mad," and went out in eager search of somebody to talk to—anybody. She talked with great vivacity, fearing they would see some indefinable change in her looks and know what it meant; and when she had deceived them, that showed, she made believe to herself, that there was nothing different; her mirror hung in a bad light. Those dull apartments! They were unbearable. She shuddered, saying aloud, "Mustn't fink about vem." It cheered her curiously to frame a sentence of the baby-talk. "Of course," she thought boldly, "there is nothing wrong with me, *really*. I've got the dismals. I shall look at some pretty shops." She went home cheerfully, with the old complacent carriage of her head, entered her bedroom, and climbed upon the bed to cry. She knew she was undone. To all her fears, no talk of marriage now—not a hint of it—and fear becoming deadly sure.

She told her Prince at last, with flaming cheeks, fiercely, that "if it was so" he would have to marry her; and in the last ditch of his villainy Varley turned to bay. Ah, it was too late now, he said; and he swore with ravings that she had spoiled his life. He had been jockeyed into marrying another woman, curse her!—"Yes, and not fit to black your pretty boots, my cruel pet. . . . But she shall *never* know! I'd shoot her first."

Barbara fainted. But there came a day when he found her ready to "hear sense." She went up to him with fright leaping from her eyes and took him by the lapels of his coat, pulling at them.

"What shall I do, Prin?" she said rapidly. "I must do something. It is so; I know it is, *and I can't*,

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I can't! Tell me what I must do. The shame—oh! it is horrible. If you don't help me I shall go wild. What shall I do? I'll do whatever you tell me if you think it isn't wrong. I've been awful, haven't I? It was not knowing, I think; do forgive me, dear, and—and—oh, it's impossible! To-day I daren't go out; I look ill—dreadful. You said—something—didn't you?"

She was scarlet, poor innocent, and he drew her head to his manly shoulder, calling her a brave little woman.

"Of course I said something, my pet! . . . It's arranged, you puss," he smiled. "Think it's worth fifty pounds?"

"Oh, so much! I shall pay you back half then. Yes, yes, I shall, because it's fair."

"Pooh! Lots more where that came from," he said.

"It doesn't matter, I shall pay it," she gravely insisted.

"What a silly little independent girl it is!" he murmured. "She knows I don't care what I spend on her."

"Still, I shall pay it," said Barbara, disengaging herself. "You'll offend me very much if you object."

"What rot!"

"You'll see. I always keep my word."

And Mr Prince Varley was equally sure that she should not have the opportunity of doing so—the little vixen! He meant to have this affair squared off. Damned good thing for her it wasn't *some* fellows. Thinking so, and having recovered his craven dignity after a month's humiliation, he was once again a man of the world. He said, "What a fuss you make!" and other comfortable things, with the indulgent smile of frank enjoyment. She understood not so much that her railing was forgiven as that he had never taken account of it. She told him he was noble.

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He said at length, "Well, little woman!" and rose to go. "Got it all in your head? *Hanover Terrace, Mrs Moss—last house; the case Mr Riley saw her about.* Now, don't forget that name or you're done, you know." He was lighting a cigar without apology, by way of showing that there was nothing queer in the arrangement. "Better not get the cab nearer than the Park," he added casually. "And your linen, my dear; excuse my mentioning it, but if you have any not marked—these women are always a bit curious."

Barbara's look betrayed, not shamefacedness, but fear. "Oh, Prin, you are sure there isn't any danger?" she said quickly.

Apparently she hurt his feelings. "Now, should I allow it?" he replied. "Is it likely?"

She withdrew her eyes from him, dropping them aside, but remained thoughtful with a face of trouble.

"Of course," he said. "I wouldn't hurt a hair of your pretty head. You mustn't think you're the only one. Why, it's as common as common."

"Won't you come with me, Prin? I mean, to introduce me?"

"My dear, I— That's all right; you'll be at home in two minutes, 'pon honour you will. You see for yourself I've got to be off straight away."

"But another day. It would look so much better, Prin. Don't you think so?"

"My dear, don't be silly. Really! You can't lose any *more* time."

"But I didn't think you meant by myself," she pleaded. . . . "I can't, Prin!"

"Well, by shots!" said Mr Varley, and hastily covered that impatient exclamation with "Nonsense! Of course you can. You're expected. . . . So now

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good-bye, my pet; I really must be off, or the governor'll miss his train and be as cross as a bear with a sore head. One kiss. . . . How long is it since the last? Too bad! Too awful!"

He put the cigar in his mouth and picked up his hat and stick with one movement; and Barbara, to gain time, hurried to the door before him. He was checked by seeing her hold the handle a moment after turning it, while her eyes pleaded with him over a nervous smile of conventional parting.

"You'll come to see me as usual, won't you, dear?" she said in a matter-of-course tone. "Then I sha'n't be so velly lonely."

"To see you? Oh, of course," he answered. "Now I *must* go;" and a moment later he had startled her by saying, in his most affected voice, for the benefit of Mrs Shuttlewell, "*Good* afternoon, Miss West! Awfully kind of you. No, don't come into the cold air. Good-bye; good-bye."

In the street, stamping off with affected haste, he pulled himself together and threw the cigar away. You might have now remarked more than usually that forward slouch of the body and neck, which lends an air of unpretending use and wont to the wearing of good clothes. He swore softly. It is possible to conceive an ideal society in which he would have been shot at sight; but the conception requires more discernment in the species than in the individual. Mr Prince Varley is a product of his age.

Barbara was left to dree her weird with what courage she could summon from an awful curiosity.

Walk by the side of this terrified girl with the child's heart as she quits her lodgings with the useless violin in its case, taken for a blind to the woman of the house, and with a little bag of travelling necessities. Her

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"Good-bye for a fortnight" is prettily spoken. She has an ingenious little errand to her dressmaker, with whom, quite casually, she leaves her violin, saying, "Will you take care of this, Miss Earnshaw, till I call for it? Don't send it home; it's on the way to repairs, but I haven't time to take it now." If she never does call, thinks Barbara—but only as a side thought, part of her habit of planning things—the violin will pay her bill and be a present too. Now she sets forth briskly, going towards the Park. Keep her company upon the dark road, through occasional streaming lights from small shop windows and under the lamps.

Consult your heart to speak the right word of human kinship to her.

The task is, to turn her back and reconcile her to maternity; to Nature's most honourable estate, appealing to all that is best in woman, bravest, tenderest, of highest emotional delight, and awaking the poetry of sane and simple life. What will you say?

Suppose you point out—it should convince her as soon as the plain facts are stated—that mothers in wedlock are only more esteemed than she will be because they have chosen honourable mates; say that the reproach upon her is mainly one of weakness, imprudent compli-
ance, a bending to kindly Nature in forgetfulness of Nature's purpose; tell her that, seeing her left alone, seeing her braver to fend for the wonderful new life than mated women have commonly need to be, they at least, understanding, will hold out sisterly arms to her. As for the cowardly deserter, men will know how to brand him for a common felon; they have the honour of their sex to care for, their inbeing reverence of the sex that bore with heavy pangs and nursed them.

Will she not be convinced?

Say, then, that the innocent new life must make

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appeal for her to all the world, crying to be received on fair terms among us—with a little gentleness, indeed, for the sake of our sad necessity to keep a hard heart against mothers of doubtful antecedents. It calls for a confident eloquence, this plea; you are evoking the courage of an ordinary English girl, not instructed to admire maternity in the abstract, just acutely sensible of her own predicament; satisfy yourself that the plea is not illusive, and urge it fearlessly, the case being desperate. You have to deal with a spirit strong as martyrdom. The girl we know and have some liking for goes to what may be her death and is not ignorant of this. Horrible to Barbara's thought, if she dies there can be no tracing her; she will be a dead body without a name, like one of Burke's. Or there was a barber somewhere, with a trap door that shot men down into a cellar, Sweeney Todd! . . . Help!—with your persuasions.

Someone coming towards her on the same causeway turns her aside to look into one of the windows. Her face is white and soberly dulled. From head to foot Barbara is ice cold, the contest of fear with fear going privily on like an ague of the mind within her; and she has glanced at the passer-by and gone forward. Her walking presently past the cab-rank is a taking of breath because she dare not trust her voice; she returns, has spoken to a driver, is hurried away to her chosen fate. You shall imagine a little of the shuddering horror with which her delicacy is to make acquaintance with the smooth woman.

Barbara West came again to her lodgings like a changeling. Mr Prince Varley had not called to see her; and she had been coarsely laughed at, and still more coarsely condoled with, for expecting him to do so.

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With the strength that remained to her she wrote to this fashionable rascal a reassuring letter, which, as it contained no reproach nor any mention of her trouble, but even ended with a touch of penitence in respect of her cross behaviour to him, she counted on to please him. It is not easy to understand the baseness of one for whom so much has been suffered. "I hope," she wrote, "to be quite strong soon, and then the summer season begins and I can pay you my share."

But she had no answer; and then, explain her folly how she might, Barbara knew at length to what manner of man she had given herself.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MACDONALD OFFERS AN EXPLANATION

IGNORANT of this calamity, Enoch Watson had still to account to himself for the world's burden of black wrongs and miseries. It seemed to him too heavy to be borne in justice for any error of our first parents; and, constituted as his mind was, it must continually ask the ancient question—Why the Creator who wrought this miracle of Nature made mankind to suffer?

If in a life to come all wrongs were righted, and one knew that, he supposed one might endure them. But why should wrong exist at all? Why should suffering come of ignorance, or light behaviour, or accident, as well as of "sin"? Was it even proportioned to our estimates of sin? And, above all, if God could perfectly order a happy life to come, why not at once? Why, in a universe so vast and wonderful, did He, whose wisdom surely had foreseen the woful consequence, create man so imperfect and doom him unrelenting to this ordeal?

If ever Enoch had no strenuous occupation or absorbing pleasure the questions might return. There was always an ugly view of life to summon them.

But for a chance impulse that launched him on talk with Macdonald, he might have had Barbara's case to stagger him before so much as an inkling lighted up his mind. Let those who think they see pass by this chapter. Macdonald states a novel point of view, and Barbara's case is not envisaged.

It was two o'clock and a night's work was ended. Heap unwell and Penny taking a Sunday off, Enoch sat

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alone and leaned back resting, with clasped hands behind his head. The sound of the "makers-up" beating the last forme in preparation for the foundry came to his ears unheeded, and Macdonald's customary entrance did not rouse him. The leader-writer eyed him with a smile, waited, wandered over to the bookcase, and had forgotten him completely when Enoch spoke.

"Macdonald," said Enoch, "once you said something about the world being ordered as it was, as if it couldn't—I think you said it couldn't have been planned in any other way. Did you?"

Macdonald laughed at the plunge, and put the book back as he answered. "Daresay I did," he said. "It sounds like my dogmatism."

"I wish I could be sure of it," sighed Enoch, looking wise.

"But, on the whole, you'd like the world altered. Is that so?"

Enoch flushed as he begged Macdonald to be serious and tell him why it couldn't be.

The cheerful Scot looked wistful. He took a chair. "You see, I don't know what views you have of certain accepted teachings," he presently demurred. "Of course, if you ask me for my own solution, I must give it; but tell me where you are and I may contrive not to disturb your notions wholesale."

"Oh, I'm uncertain of everything," cried Enoch.

So Macdonald composed himself with the necessary pinch of snuff. "*Tabula rasa*," he smiled. "Well, but is that so? I suppose you're pretty confident that you sit there and see real things around you, including me, another human being as much alive and real as you are yourself."

And, with the air of one who appreciates humour, Enoch answered, "Well, yes, comfortably."

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"Ay, but this is serious," said Macdonald; "or it might be if you'd dabbled in German metaphysics. The Lord save us as far as possible from metaphysics. I'll take it you haven't got to doubting your senses; also your ability, being in good health of body and mind, to do and say what you choose within limits."

What he was driving at Enoch had not the least idea.

"You suppose yourself a tolerably free agent, not a kind of conscious automaton—not a person ingeniously flattered by the Creator with a notion of your independence when, in fact, you are just worked."

"Oh, if we were just worked, then I should say that Paine—"

"Precisely," beamed Macdonald. "Paine couldn't be said from all points of view to work successfully. Well, there is plenty to say about that, but never mind. Let us get upon terms." Macdonald swept aside philosophies of the East and West with a tranquil egotism. "You don't want me digging at the foundations of common sense to certify them sound; and I tell you that simplifies the case preposterously. When you have to cheer a man up who won't use his arm because he doesn't understand how it works—well!" He broke into a hearty laugh and sat up.

"What you must have heard me try to say," he began, picking his words, "is that, granted the reality of some free will, the world was bound to be what it is. The man who says that God should or could have made it different," he affirmed with a combative broad grin, "is bound to show you how."

The inquirer looked dubious.

"If he don't," said Macdonald, "he's not arguing, any way; he's merely grumbling."

"Well?"

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"Well, what ails you at the world?"

That Scotch way of putting the question seemed to cheapen his fine thoughts. Enoch probably feared to look foolish more than anything else in life; but there was no drawing back, and with a reddening face he tried to say what ailed him.

"Everything. Why is there any misery at all? Sin doesn't cause it all; sin succeeds just as often as not, I think. Why is there so much undeserved pain and misfortune—things that happen to people whether they try to live well or don't care? The Bible says we should have been happy and never died but for sin. But what about such frightful things as famines and shipwrecks and earthquakes? Even if that isn't true, I don't see what God means by them . . ."

He ran on awhile, Macdonald listening patiently to the old indictment. From time to time the listener said, "Just so," or "Ahi," or gave him a quick nod, and finally in some excitement took a monstrous pinch of his snuff.

"It looks to me as if God were not caring—that is," the boy said desperately, "if there is a God. . . . But I suppose He . . . must have known what—what He was doing 'in the beginning.'"

Enoch appeared to have done.

"Well," said Macdonald, noting his timidity, "that does appear a respectful thing to assume, doesn't it?" He smiled humorously, and added, "Seeing the size of the contract, so to speak, and the impressive fact that no man living can begin so much as to guess how He did it! . . . When those things bothered me, I believe that was the consideration which kept me modest. I remember saying to myself, 'Of course, if you could accomplish a little piece of work of the same kind, say a fly like that on the blotting-pad, you might begin to criticise—modestly, that is, modestly.'" He chuckled

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at the contrast in bulk between a fly and the universe. "But you can't! It's abune your micht or the King's, as Bobbie Burns pointed out. Yes, I think we may suppose the Almighty knew. Doing is always rather more than knowing, anyhow."

Enoch's laugh did not cover entirely a foolish dread of tempered sarcasm, and Macdonald put away humour for plain exposition.

"However, this thing does nowadays appear pretty clear to me without assuming anything except an intelligent First Cause. I do say that the world was bound to be what it is. This way. To whatever extent God made man a free agent, He had to safeguard man against going too far wrong. That's the first thing obvious. Of course you may say that He might have given man infallible wisdom and good will, equal to His own; but in that case, unless man had had some creative power at the same time, he would only have been the aforesaid mechanical automaton, or something like it. His purposes being wise and good only because they couldn't be otherwise, he'd have been something less than he is, not greater. He'd have had no credit for what he inevitably did, and no hope of intellectual or moral progress, would he? Even creative power, if he had had it to occupy him, could only have been a delegation limited in the same way; and limited in scope as well—unless you conceive that the Greater can include a large number of its equals."

Enoch followed rather painfully. "You mean," he hazarded, "unless God multiplied Himself."

"Precisely. The Infinite would have had to be less than infinite to do it." Macdonald laughed his satisfaction. He may also be supposed to have been glad of a disciple who did not ask for proof of every step in a sketchy argument. "We'll assume the infinity," he

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said, "without seeing where the other supposition would lead us. At all events, I'm going to account for things as they are on the basis of one God. What God did, as it seems to me, was nicely to measure the scale of wisdom for man's endowment, so that he could go right if he would; and if he wouldn't, well, the individual man was to discover that it didn't pay. Moreover, the race had to go right all the same—which is the great beauty of the scheme."

But did the individual man discover any such thing? Enoch was for having proof of that at all events.

Macdonald sailed on. "You'll catch my idea in a minute. We're not infallible automata or gods, and there's a hard and fast law that visits the mistakes of the fathers on the children—heredity. That seems unkind. It's part of the system Darwin has just discovered in the physical world, or rather that's part of it. Now, observe. We can develop qualities; you don't object to that—nobody does. But if the kinds of error that develop *bad* qualities had not been penalised, by this time we should have been an atrocious race of monsters—the decent people, doubtless, all killed off."

He had the air of pointing out the key-move of a "mate in three"; nevertheless Enoch settled down to the defence of black.

"But why not have kept the penalty to one life? Why not have transmitted the good qualities only?"

Macdonald sighed. "You see, you're aiming to produce that automaton. If the good qualities alone were transmitted, your second generation would be exempt from error. You can't evade the horns of that dilemma."

Enoch did not look like a man convinced.

"The fact is," the brisk expositor tried back, "we want some definitions. . . . Bad qualities," he laid it down, "may be positive or negative. Imperfection of

Macdonald offers an Explanation

wisdom is a bad quality. If you're not going to transmit that, but in the second generation have perfect wisdom, of course you might as well begin with perfect wisdom. Same with evil tendency. Transmit only the wish to do good along with your perfect wisdom—really they're one and the same thing—and you have a being constructed to act one way; you've made him not free to choose at all, he simply *can't* go wrong: he's a sort of working entity that differs from clockwork in two things only—that he's alive, and that he's conscious; morally, he's on the same plane with cold clockwork. And I guess he would be much less interesting and satisfactory to the Almighty as a performance. . . . Do you catch the idea?"

"I do see what you mean," said Enoch.

"But it seems heterodox. It isn't really; and I think you won't get round it, anyhow. But you'll think it out for yourself. No, sir," Macdonald said with the gravity of his normal dogmatism, "every error of responsible man must have its double consequence—its effect in developing the bad quality and its penal compensation—and both must be transmitted. Our will and wisdom have to reckon with that; it's plain to be seen; but what happens in the case of neither will nor wisdom serving is, that the penalty tends to weed out the acquired liability."

After all, it chimed with something in his own mind, and Enoch asked, "Would you judge of right and wrong by that?"

"Partly, partly," said Macdonald, checked in the smooth career of his demonstration, "and no criterion sounder. But I'm now explaining evil and suffering, error and the check upon it. . . . This penalty. It's always a form of suffering, either pain, or weakness, or merely stunted faculty. We just have to suffer," said Mac-

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donald, "because we are more than conscious automata and less than the equals of God. But notice this. The suffering, whether inherited or acquired, isn't unjust, isn't greater than the error. If it seems greater than one's estimate of the error, you bet you oughter correct the estimate. I'm not now talking of accidental sufferings; I'll come to that presently. My point is that the worst in kind are necessary, lest the race as a whole go clean to the bad. You can't arrange to have free will without 'em, and you *can* arrange not to invite 'em. . . .

"But now look here, that's only one thing." He took by instalments another pinch of snuff, larger than the first. "I said that every fault should be measured by its penalties. I may remark, that, by the time you've measured up with any approach to fulness and accuracy, you'll be old and bald."

He put away the red handkerchief and began to rub his palms together, leaning slightly forward with one leg crossed over the other. His head poised in the manner of a person looking through spectacles, he watched, with a sort of friendly humour, Enoch's face. "All plain?" he asked.

"Oh, I think so," said the disciple, rousing himself. "It must be so. I never thought of that—that any other scheme is so hard to imagine."

"Well, try for yourself; don't simply take my word for it. The more you try that the better. I've only got my own mind to work with, and it's my discovery. I want somebody to certify to its absurdity. But there's another way that strikes me as fairly satisfactory. People say—Mr Paine says—'Goodness is never sure of being rewarded, evil can make surer.' Or they say or think: 'The rewards are very much a matter of chance and unequal opportunity.' They mean material benefits, what we call fortune, success in life, freedom from hard

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living and anxiety. They want these to be the rewards of virtue, instead of mere health and a capacity for happiness independent of them. They say: 'Evil men, in fact, being selfish, get rather more than their share of toffy, in spite of all the penalties within themselves. Besides, good men and evil suffer a great many things alike—pain, pestilence and famine, shipwreck and earthquake.' So some of us conclude to have a good time, or as good a time as we can. The notion is that nothing seems to matter much. Or else, like you and other intelligent people"—Macdonald could not forbear pleasant methods in controversy—"they get sometimes horrified at the 'cruelty and injustice.'"

"What else would you call it?" said Enoch, reddening.

"Wait a bit and let's see. Just suppose a world where there was nuffin like it—neither inequalities great enough to be irksome, nor suffering of any kind, bodily or moral—the impossible world that Ingersol would have created if he'd been God and known no better, which hypothesis he camly expects us to allow. It's the kind of world plenty of pious people, too, desiderate, though not so flagrantly—a world supremely 'happy' all the time."

He made a pause for impressiveness, and then brought out his knotty point with an air of meek inquiry. "I want to know what becomes of the virtues."

Enoch Watson did his best to think what became of them, but got no glimmering of a notion.

"You don't catch on. Well, for example, what becomes of moral courage? Would anybody have any? *Could* anybody? And if so, how could anybody else know it, or imagine such a quality in such a world? Without griefs or hardships, men would never be courageous morally, that's positive. And what about

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compassion, charity, forbearance, every other quality that has to do with magnanimity? Latent also, at best, like the eighty degrees of heat in ice, only not by any means to be melted out. Perfect happiness would have no use for them. It never would have had. They wouldn't be there! Why," laughed Macdonald, suddenly, "I'm blest if it ever occurred to me fairly, until now, what an inferior race of people this mean little perfectly happy race would be. Except a sort of Chinese beatitude they wouldn't have a trait you could admire. It's all an Eastern fallacy. I back the Anglo-Saxon against them for morals, in his state of sin—because, you observe, they couldn't have any morals."

Between astonishment at a new idea and laughter at Macdonald's liveliness, the boy's face was a picture of artless emotion. He had ceased to criticise, carried away.

"No, sir," twinkled sternly the philosopher, "we've got to take our whacks and keep a kind heart in us—that's the general meaning of things. And meantime life is rather more varied and interesting than those Chinamen would find it."

Enoch left him to muse awhile, his own brain busy. What had startled him was the unlooked-for corroboration of fine ideals, instinctive admirations of his own; in what confusion his unformed mind had been, is evident most of all from the fact that he had doubted these unconsciously, together with the old gospels which extolled them. Now his first thought was—"How much of that ancient Scripture is marvellously true?" His next, how far he had failed in sympathy with all who "took their whacks." Perhaps it was well that in this moment he had no knowledge of Barbara's tragedy.

But not so fast.

"You perceive," Macdonald interrupted with a queer

Macdonald offers an Explanation

dry manner, "that all this amounts to a quite fiendish apology for evil."

"An apology?"

"Why, certainly. Don't I say that some bad things are inevitable?"

The boy looked scornful. "I should think," he said, "it's very good for Pharisees, anyhow."

"But revolting to 'all right-minded persons,'" said the humorist, inscrutably. "You don't profess to be satisfied that I should suffer for the cultivation of your gentler sentiments. The theory's subversive of morals."

"But," objected Enoch, shrewdly, "if I were satisfied to see you suffer, they wouldn't be cultivated."

"They aren't in some people," he was answered; and then Macdonald, seeing him puzzled, ceased with a mischievous laugh to tease his apprehension. "All I mean is," he explained, "that a kind of two-edged knowledge like this won't go very far as a *motive*. It isn't religion, or a code of morals. As a principle in politics it would deserve to be unpopular, and I guess it wouldn't escape its deserts: wherefore," he sardonically said, "you don't find it in my leaders. I only think it explains things. As for motives, we've all got to be grateful for some inheritance of good ones. No danger of the virtues not being admired. They're even championed. One of the cheerfulest things I know is to watch a slum crowd listening to melodrama. . . . *Mais revenons!* Any more difficulties?"

Enoch thought awhile. "You were going to say something about death, weren't you? I think that has bothered me as much as anything," he said. "Why there should be such great and cruel loss of life by earthquakes and famines, causes that look as if they might have been avoided. This war set me thinking of

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that. Indeed, I don't see why there should be such a dreadful thing as death at all."

"Oh," said Macdonald, readily, "that's because you haven't thought out what we've been saying about error and acquired bad qualities." He checked himself from speaking with an appearance of arrogance. "Of course, you see at once that if some men developed good and some men bad qualities side by side for ever, the wrong people might be doomed to a deathless martyrdom. In that case it would be difficult to imagine any decent people. It is death, in fact, together with the weeding-out process, that makes life tolerable."

"Still, wrong-doing might have the other penalties and not death."

"Ah," said the gentle speculator, "but conceive the eternal accumulation. I take the Almighty to be kind."

Seeing him look no better satisfied, Macdonald roused. "The fact is, you've got to clear your mind of every notion about death that you have probably heard since you were born." He edged forward on the chair a little, his knuckled hands grasping the seat. One became conscious of his great shock of hair; and the kindly eyes shining from a clear-cut rigorous face, the strong and quiet voice belieing his pallor, made him picturesque under the argand light against a background of shadows. "Just fairly look at the part death plays in the scheme. It puts a clement period to every faulty life, helps to cancel error and the pains of it indispensably. Consider what the generation now living owes to it, and how much more the debt will be for the long line of pedigree that every pair of us may start. There isn't a greater mercy. Who would think that anything but sheer barbarism could make of Death a Bogey Man? It isn't only treated as a calamity—that's natural enough, for those who survive—it is

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deliberately invested with all sorts of picturesque terrors. I get mad about it. Where that kind of gospel isn't a survival of barbarism, it's sheer blasphemy. Observe the unsophisticated mind. It doesn't fear death, what we call natural death, so much as it clings to life; doesn't cling much to life when the blood is up in face of natural peril, but takes the risk manfully, say in battle, or in acts of rescue; courts the risk, indeed—travel, sport, all the rest of it—and then in old age and sickness is glad enough to give the ghost up. Seeing the use of death, the necessity of it, that's about as it should be. Why terrorise? You might as well say the Almighty missed a point—the normal courage of humanity being against his best intentions and our interests."

A lurid scorn appeared on his face, and he blazed away dogmatically.

"Why, that's the best thing to be said for this bungling war of Gladstone's. Courage is the father and essence of all the virtues whatever. To the extent that fear has anything to do in producing a show of them, they're not virtues. The man who acts with what looks like kindness—with forbearance, or any sort of gentleness—because he daren't or can't do otherwise, isn't a saint: we call him a hypocrite or a weakling. Also, nobody thanks him. . . .

"As to the earthquakes and tempests," he resumed more quietly after a pause, "well, I can only give you my own cogitation. But that," he laughed, "is what I'm giddily doing. No matter. You're not obliged to believe or be damned. . . . You said earthquakes. You see, of course, that as compared with an equal amount of disease distributed in the usual way, they stagger the imagination by mere tangible bulk. They're a striking part of the inequalities, that's a fact. As for

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the suddenness of them, sudden death is common; and but for that same terrorising, a quick death might seem to be more desirable than death after long sickness, and all the distress and vain toil of one's dearest. Many men do desire it. One has to be prepared for either fate.

"Still," said Macdonald, and this was the last word of his interpretation, "I see a meaning in these big calamities. They seem to me, being part of the inequalities, to point the same moral as unequal rewards and opportunities, and every accident that brings confusion on the aims of egotistical man. Mortal life in itself a secondary business; the main thing being the way men quit themselves, the qualities of mind and spirit in men. And that, of course, is why we are so made as to look on courage as a fine thing—why it's the quality most admired of all. You must have noticed that a shipwreck, or any other disaster in which we can observe men's conduct, is only ghastly when the heroism is conspicuously wanting. But I don't suppose such accidents of life were added to the others for the simple sake of variety and interest, though I'm a journalist. There was a nobil plenty of variety and interest without them. Surely the purpose may have been to make it plain, to the meanest capacity, that results in this life are nothing to go by. We are to judge men for what they are, by those aforesaid fine qualities which it is instinctive to admire. We do, in fact; and the world serves for nothing more surely than the development of sech qualities. James Macdonald, his philosophy."

Could he have looked into the youngster's mind, Macdonald must have been a little puzzled by his excessive admiration. It was comparable to the delight and wonder of sailing up one's first Norwegian fiord,

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touched, let us say, by the romantic thought that this may be one's proper homeland. The emotional boy—he could not himself have given a reason for it—had some ado to keep the tears back.

So much Macdonald saw ; and wondered, for his part, at the sign of an unusual fresh ingenuousness. But he had not a lively imagination. Such emotion over a simple exercise of common sense neither told him what a marvellous fine pilot he seemed to the boy to be, nor how crushing had been the distress left upon Watson's mind by a tyrannous creed. But it was as if the mists lifted and Enoch entered on surprising grandeurs, saw for the first time forms incredibly simple and big. Schubert's song of "The Wanderer" would have struck his very key.

All he found to say was, "I'm much obliged to you."

How much, he could better estimate in days presently to come. A great experience of life's tragedy was preparing for him.

CHAPTER XXXV

DRAGGLED PINIONS

ACUTER sensibility, or imagination to see how far in the opinion of dainty critics she had fallen, might have killed her. Barbara's punishment was a slow fire.

Waiting for the letter that did not come, she sat for two days in an arm-chair wrapped in shawls. Mrs Shuttlewell was at liberty to think her ill of a cold, and Barbara forced herself to make a show of taking beef-tea and jellies. Ill, indeed, she knew herself to be; weeks before going away she had begun to have pains in the limbs like rheumatism, and now they were worse; but she paid no attention to them. The astounding affront of Varley's cool desertion kept her at a nervous crisis, shivering in the wraps, her brain intensely active and critical. She would not yet admit desertion to be certain, considering that business might have taken him out of town; Mrs Shuttlewell thought her a very patient invalid; but, through an obstinate study to persuade herself that she could not possibly have been deceived in him, the shame of it burned into her.

Feverishly weak on the third day, she kept her bed; and a conviction that some Nemesis of sickness threatened turned her thoughts into another channel. Much more than desertion, she feared discovery.

Mrs Shuttlewell wanted to send for a doctor, and her talk of doing so would not be silenced by simply pretending a cold. Still no answer to the letter; and Barbara made fun of herself, to cheat the motherly Yorkshirewoman. For a day or two that served. But,

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the fever mounting, Mrs Shuttlewell's devotion grew insistent, and had to be met with all kinds of patient argument out of a mazy head. In spite of such cajolery, she spoke at last as if she would take the matter into her own hands; and then, on a sudden, Barbara's answer rang with formidable sharp alarm. It drove the woman away in great trouble and consternation. Sure, now, that this refusal of a doctor did not simply come of straitened means, she saw in it one of those imperious aversions which the simple most respect; and what to do she did not know.

Later, Barbara said abruptly, "Understand, Mrs Shuttlewell, whatever happens I won't have a doctor. I'm not going to die, though I believe I'm getting light-headed, do you know."

The woman gazed, and her mouth opened; but she answered nothing.

"So I trust you," said Barbara, who spoke with the firm and rapid utterance of fever. "You understand?"

To her embarrassment Mrs Shuttlewell began to cry.

"Don't do that, there's a good woman," she said. "It will tire me. I want you to say, to promise me. Indeed I order you. Please to speak, Mrs Shuttlewell!"

The woman wiped her eyes. "Well, it's noane for me to rule sich as ye," she agreed. "But I do think some'dy s'ould knaw on't."

"You mean my mother," said Barbara, quickly. "I wouldn't have my mother know if there were nobody else in the world! . . . My mother wouldn't come; my mother doesn't understand me. You are doing everything quite right yourself. . . . You do promise, then. If you don't I shall get up and go away."

"Well—if yo' say so."

Barbara ceased upon this to resist the malady.

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Whether it killed her or not, and what she suffered in bodily torment, were alike indifferent to her. Barbara's one endeavour was to keep awake, because of dreams—the delirium. She was haunted in particular by that unshapen mannikin whom she had pitied and helped. The dreams brought her again to Hanover Terrace, but so as to cross a maze of railway tracks in the dark, with a train approaching. Its lights appeared in the distance, and she dared not move, but watched it come thundering on with her eyes upon the gleaming metals, unable to see whether it would pass her by or crash down upon her. The engine roared up instantly before her, she looked into its huge and dazzling lamp, the whistle screaming, and fled with feet that scarcely felt the ground, coming to No. 5 as to a place of safety ; and there it was not Mrs Moss who turned to smile at her, but the grisly mannikin. In another dream she held a baby at the breast, that bit the nipple with teeth ; and she endured him because the little hands were fleshless. The babe looked up at her ; it was again the mannikin, and she flung him from her in a loathsome bundle. Her nights became a continual struggle to hold him off, but in a doze some flitter of the dream would always menace her.

The dreams grew fainter in the course of a frightful week, but the fever was long in burning out ; and it left Barbara at death's door but with a little appetite at last, and ready to take advice as to what things were good for her.

"You see," she said, "I didn't need any doctor, Mrs Shuttlewell."

A fortnight passed before she could leave her bed ; and meanwhile the kind woman, nursing her with no sleep but such as overtook her in a chair, had learned the startling secret.

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It was in loyal keeping ; she gave no sign of having surprised it.

The illness left Barbara too weak for self-torture ; and no sooner could she walk across the room unassisted than she sent for her pupils, proposing to make up the six lost weeks of their term. She could teach while sitting still, or lying on the sofa. Valiancy was dead within her ; but her slender purse allowed no hesitation, and she supposed that strength would come. Indeed, she must recover strength ; Mrs Shuttlewell presently had to wait for payment of the weekly bill, which Barbara's need of special diet kept enlarging.

Some pupils did not return ; they had not paid her fee in advance. She accepted an engagement to play at the Art Gallery in June.

Mercifully the habit of busy planning, characteristic of her in health and strength, kept its hold. Remorse being useless, she had decided not to let herself look back ; and, in looking forward, she made believe to live as if nothing destructive had befallen her. Barbara's prayers were said very devoutly, and she might repeat them at any hour of the day ; although the old bright valiancy was lost, her courage remained extraordinary. Courage failed her only to her own knowledge when Mrs Shuttlewell, upon seeing her a little stronger, said that she ought to go out. Discovering that she dared not come nearer than anything else to break her. For the rest, what caused her anxiety was to be unable to play much. The fiddle-arm ached as soon as it used to do when she was seven years old and thought her practice wearisome ; and a quarter of an hour's playing quite exhausted her.

Not even to the lost friend she had called her brother Con could Barbara think of showing herself. He had been too terribly right ; and she felt that his concern

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would join with remorse to persecute her. Not that he would guess the truth, poor worshipping boy !

Yet it was still with Enoch Watson that her thoughts were oftenest engaged, do what she would to put him out of them. She had banished him at first with a quick instinct. As when one catches at a skirt trod upon, there was some sharp tug at the ragged vestment covering her mind from itself. But, always at the heels of thought, he proposed to say a certain word to her ; and she knew what he had to say without giving form to it. The study to ignore him became a fretfulness, and she turned, suddenly and fiercely, to accuse him of having been the cause of her undoing. When she thought to rely upon him, he had left her ; after she had given him every proof of friendship, trusting him, prizing his advice and help in all she did, he forsook her in a fit of wicked jealousy. That was her misfortune—to have had a jealous friend !

Indeed, in forsaking her, he did knock away certain props of her virtue, she unaware that it leaned on props : thus far the accusation was true. How her virtue came in need of propping she did not ask herself, but browbeat the treacherous jealousy, pointing to what she misconstrued as its woful consequence.

So much for Enoch Watson ; who answered nothing. She supposed for a time that he was silenced. But no ; it seemed that he still followed with that reproachful pity of the eyes, although at a distance ; and, defending her credit, she found her strongest plea against Varley in the knowledge that Con would never have betrayed her.

Not to despise herself utterly, she had to admit an insidious cunning in Varley's pursuit of her, to think him endowed with a special skill to beguile ; whereupon the jealousy she blamed was not so blameable, but only

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Con's impatience, his unruly temper. And that came of his dislike for the man who had hurt her pride; she could not blame even that, except as it had roughly thrown her off, denying help.

Blame softened to a wistfulness, not more, at all times when, in weakness of body, her spirit ebbed; and then the banishment was near to being revoked. But she had to look in haste to the locks and bars she kept upon a breast of stormy contents. Let them be insecure, and Barbara's trouble, small in that compression, would out like the djin of Arabian stories, filling the sky with a terrific shape. Mere wistfulness, indeed, brought her to the pass of questioning what it was that Con would say to her. She kept him out of sight, privately to take account of it; for the process was an overhauling of the ragged robe—worn against inclemency of the mind's nakedness.

Would he say that he had wished to keep her what the vulgar call—an honest woman?

The phrase, darting into her mind unsought, was a thumbscrew challenge to some confession, some admission; and at the twinge it gave there came a prickly heat upon her forehead, dread of its meaning and power. She had escaped branding, and had done no harm to deserve it. Could she not hold up her head as before?

She held her head very low for her own consciousness; so low, that the panic surged up and whelmed over her. She was left at a gasp, straining to see the wave as it sank and to understand how it had taken her by surprise. For of the inconsiderable measure of any sin there might have been, she was persuaded; and not less sure of pardon. The amazement passed; Barbara had not the subtlety or the independent mind (another thing than independent will) to see that the world's judg-

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ment and the judgment of her own conscience were separate. That welter of emotion had come at a sudden hearing of the former, of what the world might say; and she shook herself clear of it only to think that she must carry about with her the secret shame of Hanover Terrace. Was there sin in that? The question recurred, an uncomfortable suspicion; put aside now, as aforetime, in the belief that her Bible had nothing to say on the subject.

A thought of Con's, about life being sacred, flashed lurid light somewhere beyond her horizon. No thunder followed it. She was drawn by recollection of how he had uttered it to see the sunny day which had been offered her.

What he would say, did she listen—what she had wincingly forborne to let her own mind shape—took form as an interrogation: Why had she refused him? And now that it loomed against her, like a purple cloud over flowery fields in sunlight, Barbara looked another way. He wanted to reproach her with all that had followed. She looked away, and the sun still shone upon flowery fields relinquished for which her heart was craving. Marriage, in that fair prospect, looked as Eden looked to our mother Eve when the angel with a flaming sword interdicted her. Barbara, too, had eaten of forbidden fruit, the Serpent tempting her in the likeness of Mr Prince Varley; and, sadly unlike our common mother of that mighty fable, she stood alone. Bleak moorland weather now encompassed her, sunless in a wide grey solitude, with the curlew wailing "Lost!" in a flight away.

In this way emotional moods might stun and chill her, but they could not quite subdue. And they were rare.

She drew a great deal of courage from Mrs Shuttlewell's ungrudging service and kindness—a really beautiful

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soul in this poor widow warming her to feel that she was no such outcast as black unfaithfulness and the world's finger of scorn would make her seem to be. Motherly, humouring her hopes and self-deceptions, waiting upon her whims with an invariable patient readiness, the dear good woman, as Barbara knew, had only an assured income of £45 a year, and yet in all the nursing she never by any hesitancy about expense appeared to consider ways and means; knew her secret, as Barbara could not fail to divine, and neither despised her nor let her suppose it very distressing. Barbara West reaped the harvest of her unaffected quick sympathy shown in happier days, that had easily won the hearts of many like this woman, who thought themselves inferiors. She had never had the vanity to pride herself on a notion of social rank; her nature's kindness had free course without respect to that, as, alas! it had without respect to real distinctions; and now, to her infinite comfort, her preservation indeed from worse misfortune than she could at all imagine, Mrs Shuttlewell took her side and behaved as if nothing were too much to do for her. She for her part took the Yorkshirewoman to her heart;—so freely that the question of paying her bill could be talked of without anxiety by them both. Once, when some new nourishing dainty was brought to her, Barbara said with a flush of tears restrained:

“Oh, you are good! I do hope I shall be well soon.”

“Never fear but yo' will!” the good soul answered.

“An' I'm fain to do for yo', doy.”

“But you mustn't let me pinch you,” Barbara urged.

“I know you are denying *yourself* things.”

“When I'm left as ye are, among strangers, there'll happen be somebody to do for me,” the woman said. It was an article of her faith.

This intimacy led to a mention of Enoch once—the

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nearest allusion ever made to the unspoken secret. Barbara's gratitude had moved her to say that she had no friends left but this unpretending Dorcas; and Mrs Shuttlewell, after a silence, asked, "Does that young gentleman know, 'at used to come here first?"

"Oh, no!" said Barbara, "I quarrelled with him; he may not be in Merchanton. No, I'm glad!" The secret was not denied even by implication. And the woman saw tears in the gallant look, and said no more of him.

But her plenary devotion of the charity that thinketh no evil was healing Barbara's hurt. It drew the sting of shame, at which remorse had sometimes bitten like an anguished beast at a broken limb. The girl rested, and grew whole again, in spirit though not in body. So it was that her brother Con's imagined sympathy ceased to afflict her; and when she well understood that her strength was ebbing—might not turn again—that life itself was slipping away—he had her ear in meekness for any reproach he might utter.

She craved reproach. On any terms she had to have the memory of him present with her. It was but thoughts, and they held no promise now; wherefore the tears would smart and flow for the promise, bright when she, with gay disdain of it, had let that promise wither; but it shone in recollection fairer than all the wrack of hopes now going out with the tide, and these she could easily surrender in dwelling on that, already quite relinquished. Through the veil of comfortable tears she made herself bare to his reproaches; and lo! he enfolded her, uttering none at all. The pity long dreaded was a dear embrace. Knowing him lost to her in truth, irrevocably, she called up a vivid radiant image of him, unconnected with special incidents and looks remembered, a spiritual lover questioning nothing,

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in whose magnanimous presence she was naked and not ashamed. Con's love of her, not Con himself, was visioned in this aura. She had it about her by night upon her pillow, and cried herself asleep in his arms, undesirous, for humility, to look upon his face.

The inward vision belonged to the mood which had conjured it, and, while this meek self-pity could be felt, she still recalled it; no otherwise, at first, than if he had been dead, as the past was. So it came that the idea of his love crept sweetly into her study of imagination:—

. . . apparelled in more precious habit,
More moving-delicate, and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of her soul
Than when he lived indeed.

But ah! for the other moods, less fervid, when the vision eluded her. The want of it became a study to remember him simply—definitely to see her brother Con himself; and that endeavour played the traitor. This or that golden time and crucible trial of their friendship was easily recalled, with every look and tone and meaning of it; passionless and clear-eyed, like a crystal-gazer, she saw the past unfold itself in pictures on a cloudy background; and the other Barbara concerned in it was coldly viewed, since she herself had no disposition to take a side against the lover. Things just as they had been, she saw; and the necessary hard consequence was a sharpened sense of things as they were. The radiant image of emotional instants grew dimmer; ceased at length to be conjurable. She no longer pitied but esteemed herself vile.

Her vileness denied the idea of his loving her, it seemed; made her lash herself with stripes to deserve even that she had been ever loved; accuse herself of the worst, exult in the dreadful fact of her present situation

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as meet, and something less than expiatory ; and, this abasement being sounded, she found herself in prospect of such a lonely death that she was driven flying, with outstretched arms of terror, to the refuge of lost souls in a Love not human—a Love which is felt to yearn over us most pitifully by those who deem themselves the vilest.

There she was secure. She found again the simple and touching faith habitual to her, strangely forgotten ; so simple as never to admit of a misgiving.

Barbara resumed the practice of reading in her Bible, much as happy wives take up the routine of their houses after illness. She discovered afresh, with an extraordinary grave rapture, the story of the woman taken in adultery. Wistful thoughts of Con she put away from her. When God forgives us, Barbara's feeling was, we ought to be content.

But, being forgiven, and at peace with her old self under this assurance of Divine compassion, she formed the timid wish that Con, the real Con, might sometimes think of her, supposing her still unspotted.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A DROP OF WATER

By Enoch Watson, Barbara was now and then remembered. But as he had to be over head and ears in something, if not in love, new pursuits left him no leisure to regret her.

The excitements of a war and political controversy ate up our ardent apprentice. He began to think he had opinions; on a sudden he felt a good deal older; and, being furnished with a ready-made system of philosophy, he would have undertaken to write on any subject under the sun at short notice.

The stray recollections of Barbara that remained were memories of defeat: he ignored them as much as possible. If they had come at all to mind of late, this was because he thought it strange that he should never see or hear of her. Finally a summer holiday in Paris, with its unimagined gaiety and freedom, was the sort of experience to wipe out old impressions.

Toward the end of July he was startled to recognise her hand in the address of a letter. Here is what Barbara had written, in pencil:—

“DEAR CON,—Do you remember Barbara West? I have been very ill since March, and find it rather dull all by myself. Will you come to see me again, for a chat? I am much changed, have to be waited on a great deal, and am writing this in bed (pray excuse pencil). Mrs Shuttlewell has been most kind, done all she could, and seems anxious I

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the arena expecting the lions. She imagined him talking still of love, and had to think what must be her answer. Inability to shape an answer short of confession flushed her to a fever, with convulsive strainings at the bonds; she caught at a hope that death might free her suddenly; and twice, when her heart singularly flagged and stumbled after a panic race, she lay giddily with closed eyes, welcoming release. The mazy palpitation ceased; she was alive; and she had to wonder what her wish had been, what had possessed her, to evoke the ordeal before her.

Bewilderment followed. While she thought only of herself, dreading the love she had imperiously longed to feel about her, Barbara could not account for the rashness involved in writing such a letter. She imputed it to her weakness; and that thought suggested a way of escape. When he came she could say she was too ill to see him.

Delivered from agitation by this artifice, she was able to think again of him only; the wish began anew to gather fascination. It came of remembering his unrewarded patience, his loyal self-control, and the way in which that other Barbara of her crystal-gazing had toyed with the love that now could never be possessed, but was a priceless cup of life all spilled upon the ground. Dear Con! he never guessed that she longed for the innocent kiss forbidden him; longed to be much dearer to him, feared to give him hope; feared, too—and ah! unkind, and all in vain and doleful—unwisely feared the mire in which a rougher wooer had pushed her down. Con's kisses would have lifted her, she thought now; never would he have done her such despite; he was her champion, and she had misprized and driven him away. Her reason for doing so? That he was honourable! That he wanted to marry

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her some day! But she would have married him, indeed she would, if only she had understood how difficult—

The flood of shame drowned thinking.

For some time past, an occupation which had allured her—bitter proof of the death of hope—was that of reading his passionate letters. Her mind flew to them now; for they put her on a pinnacle, and thus assured her that she could not be to blame for what had happened.

This it was that had made the reading endurable and sweet, even in such a woful case as hers appeared in the light they cast upon it. They set the knell of hope sounding, it is true; she read them in her bed like a spirit aloof from the body and heart of her former self, through radiant tears of pity for that foolish being now defiled and dead there. But out of the pity, and out of her full knowledge of the love they breathed, had sprung that impulse to write to him; and with it a passionate prayer to live a little longer.

How should he imagine this? She was no less humble than the woman with an issue of blood, drawn by worship of the Nazarene prophet to touch the hem of his garment. Her sense of vileness, at its deepest, made her lover so nobly pure that, imagining his look of tenderness, his intuition of her wish to be good, of her true heart's virtue (cruelly worsted and bleeding but not relinquished), she felt herself raised and healed. It did not seem to her then that she would have to make confession of her wound. He would see her; it was not a little wound that could be hidden; and to be seen so, unlovely, ready for the charnel house, would fitly punish her for the pride that once had made her careless of his homage.

She had also a queer idea that such an exhibition of the tragical proofs of her folly was owing to him, that in a way it would requite him.

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Thus she had been irresistibly drawn to him anew. Now, when the letter was written and beyond recall, she suddenly saw that any expression of his love in credulous words would be a challenge. That dear credulousness would require her to speak !

Barbara would have put the challenge past her could she have seen how to do so. For that, her aplomb of old days was wanting ; and dismay instructed her that, if she were to act a part with him, there would be no healing. It was in this abject fever of dishonour that she caught at the notion of refusing after all to see him.

And then, alas ! aware of all the imagined comfort lost, her heart cried out from the lowest pit. It was daybreak in her chamber ; she lay in a trance of misery while the light was growing. Sounds in the room above of Mrs Shuttlewell rising to the day's work at length aroused her, and in some strange way set her weeping without more grief. Indeed she dried the running tears almost cheerfully.

"Good-bye," was her thought, spoken aloud for more encouragement ; "good-bye, you patient, loving brother ; you will not know, and that is one good comfort. But, now it can make no difference, Barb'a West is loving you."

The morning postman brought her a line from Enoch, to say that he was deeply sorry to hear of her illness and would call on Saturday as suggested. That was all ; beginning formally "Dear Miss West," and signed "Yours sincerely," with his full name.

It struck a chill. But, as it put an end to her fear of unmanageable ardours, she could receive him ; and she realised the fact without pleasure.

The coveted drop of water seemed to be offered with an averted face.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ARGUMENTUM AD MISERICORDIAM

BARBARA was afflicted as the time drew near with an uncontrollable nervousness. Mrs Shuttlewell's outspoken joy at hearing of the visitor due had made her doubtful of her own sensations: and the busy doing up of the two rooms in preparation for him, which the woman went about with evident alacrity while saying no more of it, excited Barbara with recollections. She was acutely conscious of the difference between this and former visits, and unable to think forward to it. Sitting up in bed, she made her toilet, in disregard of fatigue, with shaking hands; not otherwise affected than one may be by the prospect of a surgery hopefully prescribed. Then exhaustion calmed her awhile.

His knock, an hour later, summoned all her courage over a panic of the physical heart to appear the Barbara West he knew. Pathetically, her instinct was still to please him. Pity from a cold heart is to be feared; it terribly resembles contempt.

She had need of all her arts, alas! Calling herself a scarecrow had not destroyed his recollection of her beauty, a beauty which, even in the last view of it at Sheepton, was sovereign still; and upon parting the curtains of her chamber he had to conceal a great shock.

Another face than hers looked at him with shining eyes from the raised pillows there. As he advanced to take the little slip of a hand held out, and she began to speak, a flutter of imperfect thoughts in Enoch's mind

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confused perception. The old superstition of the changeling, common to human hearts the world over when cheated of a dear image, startled him with a seeming of possibility; he noted the little brown mole in its place upon the wasted cheek without immediate conviction, and checked at her still abundant glossy hair, dressed in a fashion he knew. The face he saw was not unbeautiful; not distressing, for he had been coldly prepared to miss any fulness and colour of health; but the former and dear lineaments were quite gone. With a smile he did not recognise, of thin lips parted on a young girl's look of candour and anxiety to please, a poor invalid not Barbara challenged him with eyes of welcome.

And instantly her known voice, convincing him, made the mask tragical. She spoke as though nothing were changed since he parted from her.

"Oh, how good of you! I hope you weren't going anywhere; is this your week-end off? I've been regretting—it is so fine and sunny."

His unreadiness to come made him sensitive to the immense resignation that underlay such common words. Their mere politeness partly stunned him. How answer it, with such sincerity as she exhibited, and not in answering mock the piteous cheerful greeting? Her name broke from him: "Barbara!"

He caught his breath upon it, the sound being harshly pathetic. His thought in uttering her name had only been to imply some reproach for undue ceremony.

Barbara winced and spoke on quickly, to escape commiseration. "No, but I'd rather you had fixed your own time. You see, for me it doesn't really matter, does it? I'm always here. Besides, I've grown quite good and patient lately. Won't you sit down?"

He did so, and found words that he could use without

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hurting her. "I came when you said. I was very glad to be forgiven."

"Sure?" she quizzed. "Then that's all right." But she had a terribly cold bosom. He seemed to look evasively even when his eyes rested full upon her. So she misread his face of dismay.

He was saying, harrowed, "But you should have let me know of this before, Barbara. I had no way of finding out, but from you. I missed you, of course; but I never guessed this. Ill since March, and—"

"I told you," she interrupted him, "I had changed a good deal. You must get used to me, mustn't stay so long away again. But now let us talk of you. I'm not really ill; only weakness; and of course I keep my spirits — if you would come to see me now and then." She did not supplicate; her only wish was to talk brightly.

"But you said in your letter you had been ill since March," he persisted. "What is it, Barbara? What does the doctor say?"

"It is weakness, Con," she had to answer. "There isn't any need of a doctor."

Seeing her flush, with a nervous movement of patting and smoothing the coverlet, he supposed that Barbara called no doctor in because her purse was light.

"But in bed!" he got out. "Don't you think you should consult one? If you are not getting strong— You said—"

"You are disappointed to see me changed, aren't you?" she said quickly, with a rallying smile belied by the lip that trembled. "But I'm taking plenty of nourishment now. At first, I don't think I did. I ought to get well, I'm sure."

"Still," he pressed, "to be so long ill is a great loss of money! A doctor might save you something." And

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while she reflected that this was true, he startled her by asking, "Have you written—Do they know at home?"

"Con, I couldn't!" she said. "You don't know my mother." Her hand went out to him, with a nervous impulse to be again on terms of confidence, trusting him for tacit approval. "If I had succeeded," she began to say, "of course it might be different."

He laid his hand upon the slender fingers, thinking how she had always baffled him. "Dear, you must have a doctor," he said gently.

"Oh, I think not, Con." Her glance fluttered; the touch and tone had suddenly given her hope of the old tenderness.

"I'll send one when I go," he decided. "Is there any doctor you would like?"

She had no heart to prolong a struggle with him, and answered that she thought Mrs Shuttlewell knew one. "But I wish you wouldn't, Con. I haven't any right—"

"Oh, what nonsense!" Yet, in exclaiming, he withdrew the comfortable hand. "Why shouldn't I do that for you?"

Why, Barbara could not tell him yet; and her eyelids fell to conceal the tears. "I know you are very good," she murmured.

So she surrendered; and as for Enoch, his own firmness and the success of it surprised in him a gush of kindlier emotion. His heart yearned afresh to Barbara behind the mask; pleading with his disappointed eyes that she could not be lost to him beyond recall. Her loveliness—with grief he could relinquish it: his real loss was her look of Barbara. Even her smile, the placid sweetness of which had been his chief recollection of her, which had in the beginning charmed

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and since with promise haunted him, even her smile was lost—the special mien that, for him, had been the beautiful very spirit of Barbara brooding on quiet lips. He sought her hand again, speech being denied him.

Barbara strove with a queer sense of mournfulness. Giving way to his friendly proffer, she was deeply aware of the gulf between them; love, not friendship now, her misery thirsted for; and love was forfeit. She plucked up courage to resume the pleasant manner.

"Now tell me how you are getting on," she commanded. "Working hard?"

Glad of her good spirits, he made an effort to answer gaily, telling her what reading he had done. He was aware, while he talked, of a certain prettiness and lustre in the clear-cut face, pillowed above her frilled bedgown.

"Good boy," she said. "If I could work too, I shouldn't mind being ill so much. Still, I have some pupils left. You see, I can teach lying down."

His look of wonder at this fortitude sobered to compassion under the explanation she met it with. "There's nothing but the weakness. When I am out of bed I get nasty fainting-fits, and of course that may frighten people." To recall his brighter look, she went back instantly to the hope he held out. "You think a doctor may do me good?"

"I'm certain he will!"

"I do hope so," she responded; "it is so wearying. I lie awake at nights— You don't mind the window being open? I like it open when nobody is here; that keeps me from being quite dull. The people round about are funny; and there is a cat that comes to keep me company— But oh! the nights." She fought against a tremulous wish to appeal to his pity; adding, "I

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waken suddenly," and then exclaiming at the fineness of the day.

Somehow she struck a note of superstition. He fancied strange meaning in the hinted dread of sleep, and repeated, "You waken?" questioningly, with a dry throat.

"Oh, falling; all kinds of starts, you know." Purposing to make light of it, she nevertheless found herself saying: "Sometimes I think the heart is a little affected." She glanced, to see how he took it, and her reward was in the flush of alarm he could not hide.

"Dear, you should have had a doctor long ago," he said earnestly. "To lie imagining— It must have been miserable!—to lie and fancy things like that. I shall go and get a doctor to come at once."

"Oh, not yet, please." The words escaped with a cry of passion in them, seeming shameful to her; and, while she kept his hand, her immediate instinct was to cover them with a general plea. "It is so long since I'd anybody to talk to."

"If you're not anxious, dear," said he; and then, in a pause, while each drew quieter breath, she felt the balm miraculously invade her wound. For he saw her as she was, and he could still be kind. The thought that she had almost denied him sight of her, withheld herself in fear of him from this content, shook her with a sigh of great relief. She lay back upon the pillow, closing her eyes. Enoch saw the lids tremble, felt a little twitch of her fingers once or twice upon his hand, and beheld her forgiveness with a heaving breast; for so he read these signs. It was as if she said, no words being needed, that she did not blame him for the loneliness; and her love was electric in those light pressures. Contrition stupefied him with a shuddering quick sorrow sharply known. She loved him; she was dying. And it was long since anyone talked with her!

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"Oh, Barbara!"

She heard the words like a groan, and saw that he had covered his face, leaning an elbow on the bedside. "Dear Con!" she murmured.

He was sobbing!

"Don't, Con, please," she begged. "It hurts me. . . . You will make me think I ought not to have sent for you."

Thereupon he confused her for a moment by fiercely accusing himself. "Ah," he said, exposing his face, "there should have been no need for it. Yes, you forgive me, I know; but not I myself. I left you. All this time you— I ought to have known; I ought to have been by to see that you were cared for, to prevent this." The strange voice he forced grew louder, and he said things perfectly wild, that she could not stop. "I am the cause! You might have been well and happy. Not send for me! If I thought—if there were no hope, and you fancied— I believe I should feel like Cain. Do you know, that piteous letter— It's a wonder I came to you at all! Ah, I'm exciting you, dear." He trembled to embrace her.

Barbara was not conscious of being excited; his distress, being irrational, rather induced in her a compassionate calm, so sure she was now of making her own fault plain if he would cease, and cheerful in the thought of doing so. She said,—

"No, dear, but listen. You mustn't talk like that, because you don't know. Of course all that is past, and we are good friends again. But I was the one to blame, Con—yes! I've had time to think about it—for I wouldn't do as you advised; I know that I drove you away. You were right in what you said then; that's why I don't forgive you, silly boy, because there's nothing to forgive! . . . But, Con, I don't expect to

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get well again. So we ought not to wish for it, should we? I'm dreadful sorry, but you mustn't let it trouble you. You must just think it is past, Con; I mean our love, and that; indeed I am quite happy if you are friends with me; quite."

She meant if he was only her friend, not more than a friend; but the bitter-sweet submissiveness of her little speech, so prettily like her in being tactical, so tristfully unlike in its hapless docility, searched his heart for all the old worshipping thoughts of her. They sprang to life, imperishable, unsullied, with a passionate sense of her uncomplaining martyrdom.

"Ah, don't say past," he said to her. "How can I let you go, now that I have you? Oh, you shall be yourself again! My dear, I never so loved you as I do now. You are mine, Barbara; ah, dear heart, now you don't deny it!"

"No no," she gasped; and he saw her eyes distend with alarm. She said quickly, almost voicelessly, "Con, you don't know;" and then her face grew dull, with the look of physical distress. "Wait, please," she murmured. A returning pain of the heart dragged at her breathing. But another pain more vital was dragging at what had been a full breast of happiness.

He thought she had meant "You don't know how ill I am," and saw confirmation of that meaning in the struggle she made to take breath upon pain, concealing it. For his affrighted eyes, this had the look of possible death coming. He stood helpless, asking, "What is it? Shall I call Mrs Shuttlewell?" A bottle of smelling-salts on a little table caught his eye, and he fearfully lived in hope again when she took it from his hand. Presently she laid it aside and put a handkerchief to her eyes. Fear of exciting her afresh prevented speech; and he longed to take the wasted little figure in his

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arms, telling her that what she feared could not divide them, that it plighted them.

Barbara could have told him, if words had offered. The harsh fact refused to be spoken. She gave him her hand again — both hands — and the sisterly look out of humble tears. What she said, however, conveyed to him nothing but the humbleness; which after such a paroxysm pierced him profoundly, seeming almost like a piteous loss of reason, sweet bells jangled.

"Dear old Con! Oo mustn't make me sad. Barb'a West wasn't at all a good girl, not a bit worth her big brother crying for. That's why she doesn't want to get well, you know. *That's* why she didn't send."

He bent over her with a great effort of self-control, releasing his hands to lay one of them upon her hair, while he kissed the shining forehead. And for a moment the tenderness of this deceived her; she thought he understood. Then, as he spoke again, the immense unlikeliness of what she would have to say appeared in his unshaken trust; and courage to tell him failed her.

"Oh, Barbara, don't!" he besought. "To blame yourself, for cruel jealousy in me! And not get well? Of course you must get well. How should you hope to mend without a doctor? Do you know what it is, Barbara? You have got very low, and so you see things in a queer light. Why," he laughed, "you said you were a scarecrow."

"I've seen myself." She replied to the proffer of idle comfort though an inner voice was crying, "Why does he talk? Why doesn't he see?"

"But you're not a scarecrow!" he said, and raised himself to look her in the face. "You are beautiful. People can never judge of their own looks. Your face is different, of course"—he tried for honest speaking, perhaps to convince himself as well as her—"because

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you've been indoors so long, and given way to thoughts but it is purer, somehow brighter. Ah, lying here, no wonder. . . . You must have thought I had forgotten. I had, I believe."

Dared she tell him? But what to say! A dreadful hurry of the spirit had come upon her with the doubt; his caressing her still forced the question, made her see that unless she told him now, at once, very nakedly, to speak of it would be a distress impossible, a horror. Quick reason showed her this, while his touch, and the tone of a voice dear to her, offering hope and comfort, pleaded like wine with the senses. Ah, why had she to tell him at all? If she was to die, why need he know? She sank into a half trance, her mind reeling; and why would Con go on talking to her pleasantly, when she had explained that she was ready to die? The effort to resent it fixed her attention again on what he was saying—intimately to her ear, as he used to talk when they were so mournfully happy; smoothing her hair, too. Pitiful!

" . . . I can tell you now," he murmured. "I *tried* to forget. I thought you loved somebody else. Ah, forgive me! You do, I know; but I"—his voice caught on a startling sob—"I was like Edward Gray!" She felt him grip and hold his breath; and in the pause, while breath forsook her too—though Barbara did not know the poem—a hot tear of his plashed upon her cheek. He began to speak the lines in a queer whisper.

"Filled I was with folly and spite,
While Ellen Adair . . ."

She had never heard such a deep cry as he gave, or such weeping; a man, and so fiercely shaken with it! The excessive grief had no other effect at first than to

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frighten her. There were sounds as if his heart must be torn; and she stirred from his embrace before the impulse to assuage his grief moved her to speak comfortable "Don'ts" and "Dear old Cons," begging him to control himself and then beginning with a little regular movement softly to pat him, like a mother with her child.

But Barbara's heart was lead. If he wept so ungovernably for little, for mistrusting her it seemed, she had to suppose him one who would think her fault very heinous.

This revelation of him—she conceived it to be a revelation, and almost fortunate, seeing how the truth had trembled upon her tongue—not only sealed Barbara's lips but killed the joy she had in his restoration to her. A great pity for him took its place, pity she might not show. The movement of her hand stopped. She lay back again without power even to think, a weight upon her like the cold sea, glazing her eyes.

"Ah," he said, rousing, "but you shall not be Ellen Adair, my dear. I am tragical." Drying his face and half averting it, he did not mark her ashen look. "I never did forget, in reality, but thought of other things. . . . I never can forget—the happiness you gave me! I am sure there was never a girl so kind. It was wonderful; we were dear friends at once almost; as if we had always known of each other." His voice at her ear grew musical again, distressing her. "Do you know how I account for it? Because you kept nothing hidden; your way of thinking aloud. So I could see your heart, the kindness in it. Every little impulse and thought might have come into my own head as well as yours, before you spoke; and you were so confidingly mistrustful, so prettily wise about things.

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But oh, the delight—to be with you . . . You did learn to trust me, didn't you? Except," he laughed low, "that you would never let me kiss you. Ah, but you knew—I think—you knew that I really loved you. . . . Tell me!"

She had to question her ears for what he was asking. "Oh, yes, I knew," she murmured, and wearily began to listen again; he seemed so happy. To have made him so, even in a time beyond recall, gave her heavy bosom ease. Ah, let him talk of it! Vile she might be, and only God forgave her; she had done a little good, and was glad of it.

He drew closer, enfolding her; and she had a very secret thrill of reviving pride in herself, that his physical liking had not been extinguished.

"Do you remember the very first of it? When I did not dare, you were so beautiful! The night we overtook you going home, Jack Darbyshire and I, and you showed him the new frock; I scarcely looked at you. It was like a dream; I tried afterwards to see you in my mind, but no! you were something—not real; I never could bring it back; only the feeling, a great thrill . . . trembling. Still, you spoke to me, didn't you? That was my joy; I mean, you seemed to say we might be friends; and yet, that day you found me at the foot of the Art Gallery staircase, I believe I hadn't the courage to have gone up alone." He laughed again. "It is funny; but I thought I should seem bold; I had only seen you that once, you know. And afterwards, when I found my nose put out of joint—you remember?—how miserable I was, and what you said to make up for the disappointment, to console me. . . . It was just like you always. I believe you made me happier that day than I have been in my life, just by understanding what I felt, and the kindness. What did you think

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when I couldn't keep the appointment? That I wasn't caring?"

He was content to be answered with an inarticulate sound.

"And then at Dingley—oh, Dingley! That taught me, Barbara." He paused, and saw her as she was now, wasted, lying on his arm very lightly, quite passive; saw how tears were streaming from under the blue closed eyelids; and her simple fear of marriage, so long inexplicable to him, looked like a shadow of this contracted fate cast before. "Oh, my dear," he said, giving to the winds his former thoughts of it, "I am afraid I tried you a great deal, begging for more than you could give me. But believe me, I am very grateful. Even if I had not found you again, I was grateful, dear. Do you know what my thought of you was when it seemed all over between us?"

She knew too well. Hastily she said, "Ah, no, Con; pray don't tell me that. Let us forget that. Talk about the old times; I like to hear you."

"It is about the old times," he reassured her. "I thought—this is what I thought: that it is a great thing, a wonderful and holy thing, for a man to have once known the pure heart of a woman. It is like religion. A man must believe in God ever after. For I knew you were tempted as well as me: that was why you would not let me kiss you, wasn't it? And one day," he whispered, "I peeped, Barbara, and saw you with your Bible. Dear girl!—Yet it can't be wrong to *feel* like that; God made us so!"

On a sudden in her turn she began to weep passionately, and surprised him to a silence.

He supposed that in prospect of death she had repented their intimacy, false-colouring it; and, as if refusing solace, she put up the slender hands to her face, and

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turned her head away. She even shrank under his touch, laid upon her arm to restrain the grief. The movement seemed to accuse him.

"Surely, surely, Barbara," he said, "you need not take it so to heart. Don't! It is terrible to hear you sob like that. . . . Oh, but this is from a foolish notion. If we had given way . . ."

Her punishment was greater than she could bear. "Oh, pray leave me!" she cried out. "Leave me, I beg you, Con."

He stood in great astonishment, anguished by his wish to be of comfort. What should he say? How tranquillise such cruel causeless grief and mere distraction?

"I cannot let you blame yourself," he said. "Listen! . . . If all that was wrong—ah, listen to me, Barbara!—if it seems wrong, the blame was never yours, but mine. *You*, why you were always sensible, too full of your music, and of planning; I was desperate many a time because you were. I thought of nothing but my love day and night; I would have died for *your* love. . . . Think how I tempted you, how mad with jealousy I was—because you did not love as I did."

He stood up from caressing her in vain, and, at his wit's end, spoke almost impatiently. "Ah, you *say* it is past! Why think of it? If you can't forgive yourself, what hope is there for me? You should hate me: I shall hate myself, bitterly! . . . But see how bitter it is, dear; I never, never meant to bring such misery on you! I longed instead—I longed—"

What more he would have said was hindered by emotion. He did not see poor Barbara, whose sobs had tragically ceased, uncover staring eyes upon him.

"Con," she said, "you will drive me mad."

The hardness of her tone startled him, and then he

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did see. She had raised herself, and her cheeks were hot with strong excitement.

"You don't know what you are saying," she told him quickly. "It is quite a wrong idea of me; I'm not good like that, and you have nothing to do with my trouble. Please go; please!" She fell back, under the reproach of his eyes. "You make me excited, dear, and I don't think it is good for me. Go now. Ah!" she pleaded feebly, in another spasm of pain, "to please me, Con! You always did as I wished before. . . . Oh, I'm ashamed!"

Dismayed, confused, and by a pitiful gesture at the last abashed profoundly, he passed through the curtains and found his way out of her rooms.

Barbara West lay with shut eyelids in mere physical suffering, sharp and long continued; until her heart beat easefully again, and the flush at length abated on her cheeks. The spasm had been so severe that it was as if the scene just enacted were remote. Aware of a brightness in the room, her eyes came open to the cheerful sunlight. Gratefully she found herself alone, and gratefully drew breath in summer air, conscious of the scent of mignonette wafted in from a window-box.

When she had recalled everything, her face preserved a clear serenity.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MAN'S PITY

ENOCH in going had the sensations of one who has fired a gun not knowing it to be loaded, and who hears a dear victim cry out alarm of him as well as cry for anguish. Fear of what was irreparably somehow done smote and stunned him; she implored him frantically to leave her bleeding, and he could only go! The shock was to his love, in the necessity of so leaving her. How she had been hurt, what incredible wound there was, he so little understood at the moment that his own stupefaction of thwarted love was all. He stood in the passage more than half deprived of sense by it, feeling the house reel emptily about him, and bore his heart-ache like a stab that has gone to the bone. A faint reminding thought of his reluctance to come, as if it had been a premonition, gave him the notion of fatality in what had happened.

Mrs Shuttlewell spoke in a low voice at his elbow. "What do yo' think of her, Mr Watson?"

He strung his jarred nerves to say, "There is some doctor she said you knew;" and thereupon the woman surprised and touched him by quietly beginning to cry. That is to say, there was at first only the sound of tears in her speech. Answering "Yes, there's Dr Partington, i' Halifax Road," she asked him, after a fluttering pause of diffidence, to go into the living-room; and he divined her intention that Barbara should not hear her speak uncheerfully. She shut the door, saying, "You must excuse me not being fine, but eh! I'm fain ye com', fain

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I am ;" and a breathy fulness in her voice, revealing sharp anxiety hitherto suppressed, put him in touch with her, so that he was master of his faculties to listen. He saw that the woman was flushed and nervous. She dusted a chair with her apron, checked herself at the thought that she could not expect him to stay and talk, and hastily spoke, standing with a wistful face.

"What do yo' think of her?" she asked again, and evidently hung upon his answer.

"I can't say," he shook his head. "Why has she never had a doctor?"

His astonishment shown in asking the question embarrassed her, and the nervous flush deepened, while she replied, "Nay, she wouldn't hear on't! Nay, I wanted her to, I talked that way, but I think she fully thought of mending. See yo', Mr Watson, I've never hed my sleep sin', for thinkin' on't. Like as I worn't doin' my duty by t'young lady; an' I feel"—her voice rose, welling—"I feel for her like one o' my awn, for all she com' to me so grand. I lig wakken (lie awake) mony an hour, freatin'. One like me cannot say her. Eh, I'm fain ye com'; ye can say her. I thought ye wod come. 'She'll lippen,' I thought, 'to one of her awn mak' o' folk, if she willn't to me,' I thought. Ye see, she says her mother willn't hae nought to do wi' her. I niver heard o' sich work! What do yo' think on't? Do yo' know her?"

He said he had never seen her.

"Why, but I think she s'ould knaw," the good soul flamed. "It's not reight nateral. I could like to gie her a bit o' my mind; ay, an' I wod do if I knew where to find her. I wod that. I'd tell her what a—a reight saint that is, pinin' away wi' nob'dy to stand up for her; a reight saint, if iver there wor one. As patient, an' niver plainin', an' talkin' o' what she'll

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do an' that; it'll hae to be in a better world, I judge—
an' eh, deary! I think sometimes it cannot be long
while she's taen."

The woman ceased with a trembling lip, her mouth
open with the quick thought of dismay, and so turned
aside to wipe her eyes.

Enoch, his own breast labouring, paired her in that
gesture with an aunt of his own, in whom a sense of
injustice or unkindness would rouse her essential
timidity to shows of boldness; a woman very quick
to feel for others. The voice, too, was not unlike,
being reedily sweet and deep—a beautiful voice in a
plain countrywoman, vibrant with her bosom's amplitude
of love and sorrow. He was profoundly touched, drawn
to her in liking and gratitude. He reflected that for
months she had been Barbara's single friend.

"I know you've done what you could; everything,"
he said.

"Eh, do yo' think so?" she cried, with a flash of
pleasure. "Nay, I do not say to myseln that. I lack
skill to do what I wod. But she gets no good o' what
she can tak', poor doy; it's a decline, a reight decline
it is. But then, he's a fearful clever doctor."

He asked more particularly where the doctor lived,
and she was at pains to direct him.

"Ye mun say it's at Mrs Robert Shuttlewell's," she
said as he turned to go; "an' tell him I hev'n't for-
getten what he did for *me*; no, nor niver sall do." She
spoke of this with a brightness again upon her haggard
face. "An' what think yo' that wor? He tended my
husband for fifteen month, an' he wodn't tak' a penny
piece, 'cause he thought Robert' maister s'ould hae paid
it. He wodn't. An' I think I're niver so taen tull* i'
my life, as when he telled me to keep that brass 'at I'd

* Taken to, surprised and pleased.

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been savin' out o' Robert' club money! Now, he's a gentleman. Ay, an' called ivery week, he did, an' niver seemed to thoil us of his time, for all he could do nought but change bandages."

She broke off her praise of Dr Partington to offer Enoch tea; but he was impatient to be gone. He gently disengaged himself from a mesh of reminiscent talk, feeling, however, that he owed the woman more attention.

"Well, I hope he can do some'at," she ended. "I telled her what mak' o' gentleman he wor; but yo' see"—she sank her voice—"a lady like her cannot be behodden to a stranger. An' I'm reight proud o' what she's letten me do; proud, I am. Nay, but when she com' at first, I thought she're a deal too fine for my house; I hardly knew what way to cut an' butter bread for her, she made me that nervous. So she just com' in an' did for hersel', poor doy, like as she'd been born tul't! I couldn't let some do *so*, whatever they knew; an' I—didn't reight like it, nawther; but she spake so nice an' hed sich a young mistress way wi' her—afore I could think, she'd planned all out an' done't! She hed; an' better pleased nor if I'd done it for her. Eh, well! She's been coined rarely."

With Barbara's cry of anguish still echoing cavernous, Enoch started. The word "coined" points at heartless ill-treatment. It was dropped without intention, clearly without thought that he would catch at it for a definite meaning; perhaps with no reference but to a heartless mother. But as the simple woman met his eyes, her mouth came open with a queer look of being at his mercy; she paled, looked down about her with a fluttering glance, and made a show of turning to her slopstone, where there was work to resume. The pause appeared the more significant when he confused her by offering his hand, a form of

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leave-taking to which the plainer sort of Yorkshire folk are not accustomed.

For the time being, her manner chiefly intensified in him the sense of tragic hurry with which he went in miserable search of the doctor. He could not think at all coherently.

Dr Partington was an imposing, comfortable man in his fifties, a general practitioner of the old school. His greatest qualifications were a manner, common sense, a good heart and his experience. Abundant flowing hair and beard lent him unusual picturesqueness. In moments of dignity he might be said to wear a mane; but the little black and twinkling eyes under his bushy brows belied that leonine allusion. His nose and face being very red, he had rather the look of Father Christmas. He was only iron-grey as yet, and in place of the red gown lined with crimson he stood in a long and loose frock coat; but the grave resemblance was in part suggested by a ceremonial urbanity, suitable to rare appearances. When he appeared to Enoch, it was with a courtly bow like an obeisance; and the ex-reporter recognised him. He was the president of the Yorkshire Folklore Society, a respected antiquary.

With a wave of his arm in which you were meant to see the generous *rôle* of medicine, he bade the young man be seated. It was seldom his lot to make a better impression. He awoke in heart-broken Enoch an anxiously mingled trust and awe, such as may be imagined in one who goes with trouble to a ghostly confessor.

"I want you to see a patient—Miss West—at Mrs Robert Shuttlewell's in Villa Grove; No. 13," said Enoch brokenly.

Dr Partington thought the young man a little hysterical. He said in a smooth voice of ordinary volume, "Ah, yes, Mrs Shuttlewell," and took a seat

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in the midst of the room, by a table on which there lay a brass inkstand and a great ledger. With a leisurely air he drew his long coat laps over portly thighs, brushed a speck of dust from his knee, and leaned a consultative elbow upon the table's edge, beginning to stroke his beard. Enoch's second impression of him was that the face (among so much mane) looked small, and the eyes kindly. Dr Partington imperceptibly unbent to his nervousness, trying to remember where he had seen him once before. "Is the illness—er—recent?" he asked.

"No," said Enoch; "I'm afraid it must be serious. Miss West has been ill since March. She is very weak, in bed."

Dr Partington leaned back in the chair, frowning at his handful of beard. This, perhaps, for professional gravity. The good man's habit was to inspire if possible a little cheerfulness. He now asked, indeed, a question or two about symptoms, pretending to diagnose the case at second hand, and hummed and ah'd with a hopeful look. When he rose, paternally smiling, and announced an intention of seeing the patient that evening, Enoch said gratefully, "Thank you very much, sir. And will you send the bill to me?"

Dr Partington bowed again. "Your—er—name, sir?"

"Watson—at the *Chronicle* Office."

"Dear me, dear me; I beg your pardon," he beamed and twinkled. "Of course! You once—er—reported an address of mine. Allow me to embrace the opportunity of thanking you for that service. Er—and Miss West—?"

"Miss West is a friend of mine," Enoch blushed. "But I—she is in lodgings, and—" He had the notion that he ought to explain why he took the expense upon himself, but the doctor cut him short.

"With Mrs Shuttlewell. Quite so. In excellent hands, I am sure. Most thoughtful on your part, Mr

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Watson: if an old man may be indulged in a compliment." And he managed to convey some sense of added esteem in a last salaam.

Enoch instantly forgot him. The incredible grief he seemed to have spied out had to be burked, resolutely made away with.

Sick and faint after a moment's encounter with it, he stiffened under a revulsion of self-reproach and threw it under him, feeling his imaginations foul as Vulcan's stithy. Something there was, he must believe, but not that, which he had conjured up from odious depths. His love called upon all his dear knowledge of her to deny to that a shape and reality. *What*, then? Her distress had been vivid; something not less than terrible, unknown to him, had looked out quickly like the imp from the Devil's bottle. He had to think his glimpse of it an illusion. What had he seen, mistaking it?

For oh! poor Barbara! it was not a time to mistake her afresh. The first mistake by itself appeared sufficiently base and dire; irretrievable, too, for in his heart there was no response whatever, none, to the hopes he had urgently uttered; he well knew that the dream of golden days could not be dreamed again. His heart cried "Lost," in a flood of bitterness. He remembered a German waltz of "*Geliebt und Verloren*," the sensuous air of which played itself in his mind's ear dirge-like, inexpressibly mazing him; and his first more tranquil thought was one of wonder, very thankfully felt, that he had been able to simulate love and hope so easily.

What could the meaning be? The boy's poetic sense of her rejected grossness; and, although he did not suspect the grossness to lie in his own judgment, love had a pardon for every fault in advance of knowing it, a kindness for every imperfection. Her heart being his familiar shrine, he knew and worshipped all that was.

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The cause of her distress, then? Conjecture failed him as if he had been required to think evil of the dew when it glitters, cavil at sweet music, suspect the violet; and yet he knew her to be human, and had passionately desired in that astonishing knowledge to shield her from every breath that blows.

His heaviness, no doubt, is common. Only the very young and the very old escape it. We know such heaviness when those we love come ever short of a fancied perfection we impute to them; the sense of excellence is at tragic odds with our affection. Love cannot arrogate, and love is the guide; we are unjust only where we lack it. Yet love must idealise always, and most in wooing days; we are uplifted so.

Enoch Watson's love touched its height now, when hope could not revive; and how, while suffering that dismay, should he find such tragic odds believable? He walked the streets in a chill bewilderment, feeling his hurt although he would not own it. For proof that he was whole, he had to think upon the sweet days gone, the tenderest moments; but he could not endure such memories in any public place; instead, he embraced a grim thought of playing the man, and summoned all his forces to be as one of the crowd unmoved about him. Their faces were most natural. He caught at small distractions, the crack of a whip, the peculiar cries of hawkers, street urchins noisily playing at marbles in a ginnel. The perpetual quick disputes and touch-and-go activity of this boys' pastime held him idly watching them; and only when he turned away, drawing a breath and perceiving how full of sunshine the street was, did he know what weight of oppression had lain upon his heart.

In the instant of measuring this, his mind was clear. He knew that Barbara wished for shame to die. Then thought reeled with him. He had no wish to know

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what the shame might be. Thought reeled, and he rallied himself to a strong and fine resolve, the response of his nature to its sense of a great injustice: if she lived, he would make her his wife in spite of all.

No sooner was his pity turned to purpose than he tasted happiness. What need to show the come-and-go of thought, not all heroic, in the long day and night before he knew the worst? Enoch Watson came to manhood on it.

Dr Partington said gravely, "Ah, yes, I have seen your patient. But—er—you should have come to me earlier, young gentleman"—his head wagged—"much earlier."

Enoch, paling, explained that he had not known of the illness until a few days ago.

The doctor's head continued to wag slowly. "Ah! Unfortunate. These delays, delays; the greatest handicap on medical science," he sighed; "and they bring it into some disrepute. . . . But this young friend of yours," he went on, unable to mask a little curiosity and wonder, "must have had a very severe illness—months ago! A fever, rheumatic fever; she must have been very ill indeed! Has she not—er—a very strong will of her own, Mr Watson?"

"Yes, she is very brave," Enoch said.

Dr Partington raised his hands and cast his head back, as if this were a grave symptom. But while he talked he was considering the lad's too sensitive face.

"Women are extraordinary," he observed. "Still—er—our best plan, Mr Watson—I think our best plan will be just to look as cheerful as we can. Eh?"

"You mean . . . there is no hope," said Enoch, steadily.

"The heart, sir, the heart," said the doctor.

The idea of death, which to all young minds is strange, was in the uncertain mind of Enoch Watson still shot with a sense of supernatural peril—of some great crisis and

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emergency. He quailed. The old barbaric thought of a hard and terrible Taskmaster, awaiting death to exact his penalties, was deeper rooted, after all, than the faith in God's conditional kindness which he had rejected with it.

"Yes," said Dr Partington, "I am afraid the utmost we can hope is kindly to prolong the life a little; to smoothe the descent into the Valley, Mr Watson." He used the hackneyed phrase with a note of interrogation, almost consulting the young literary man on a point of taste.

Cast back upon his knowledge of Barbara's resignation, Enoch felt as if the doctor imputed some of his own fearfulness to her. "I don't think she is anxious to live," he said.

"No?"—Dr Partington waited for something more, and then ventured to say gravely, "Well, well; perhaps she is nearer the end than I supposed. Nature, you know, is very merciful to her martyrs. When she has tired them, Mr Watson, they are always ready to rest."

At this the tears would have flowed; and Enoch rose to take his leave with broken thanks.

He did not return to Barbara at once, although his heart was bursting with compassion. Be with her he must, lift her up to his heart dying, assuage whatever simple and lovely shame distressed her. Yet he could not face the ordeal because of one reflection, which, as he tried to think how the approach of death might be hidden from her, suddenly and profoundly dismayed him. What should he say if, in a timid moment, she spoke to him of the great mystery?—turning to her brother Con for courage, asking "his opinion"?

What *must* he say, and what believe? That was the question, for in such extremities one cannot palter or pretend; and in circumstances that cried a supreme summons to his manhood he held back, fighting against the sick trepidation of cowardice.

CHAPTER XXXIX

GOD'S PITY

DISMAY at first unmanned him wholly, for he imagined her seeking confirmation of all that he had sincerely rejected, or left an open question. A great gulf appeared already fixed between them, impassable as that of the dread parable, preventing his farewells. And so came tearless grief in its wofullest throes; Barbara lay dying, and for aught he could have said to her the heavens were as brass.

But it was insupportable. The higher mind within him cried suddenly to God, a cry inarticulate, but imperious for justice. In this cry of great moments, faith is instinctive. The heavens as brass? It was unbelievable! To her at least, if never yet to any soul created, God owed so much of pity that justice could not fail.

Why, then, he could go to her; he could honestly speak with her, in face of the mystery.

The unhappy lad lived for an instant in glad astonishment. Then he was struck with doubt as to whether she would wish to see him, and the revelation clouded over. After all, it is not surprising that this doubt should have swayed him. He had wrung from her such a confession, and was so heartstruck at his unwitting cruelty, that, although he would have given his life to have her feel the nothingness of all that pained and shamed her, he supposed she would be only shamed and pained afresh by his approach.

On her part, Barbara thought his consolations lost; and the ease she had felt of having bared the worst to

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him was forfeited in that belief. She told her nurse and confidante that she had driven him away, and the heartsome woman, not divining what this meant, was silent when she might have answered it. All she uttered was an exclamation of concern: "Eh, wha'tiver for?" to which Barbara, craving sympathy, replied, "Oh, it was too much, Mrs Shuttlewell." That was taken to mean that she could not go on feigning innocence—who could think that she had disavowed it?—and the woman's "Nay! Poor doy! Ye're too hard o' yoursel'," at which they came to the brink of tears, left Barbara thinking she had made all plain. She could not send for him a second time, the confession abased her too deeply; and the one person who knew his devotion to be unchanged had her mouth sealed by this misapprehension.

Words were few because the doctor's visit, in spite of all his cheerfulness, had left a shadow. He had not said that she was to get well, and Mrs Shuttlewell had lost hope as she saw him go.

To tired Barbara, what he might have said of hope was indifferent; but she was daunted that he had not put a term upon her suffering. She had foreseen that he would treat her like a child; and in great weariness of spirit after the talk, she lay and thought her penance endless. It occurred to her that she was like the souls in "Revelation"—she fatigued herself in vain to find the passage—who were imprisoned under a big stone and cried "How long?" When she dozed, it was to dream dimly of preparing to sing in an empty and cold hall, alone; and the circumstance that she had to sing, instead of playing, troubled her with a sense of something critical. But Dr Partington having sent a cordial, its effect was to compose her a little to meet the recurring pangs: as each came on she put a breath-

God's Pity

less little prayer up, thinking this might be the last. But oh, the bitter loneliness! The long slow drag of time now all was over!

To what went on about her now, she gave no heed; her cat mewed from the window-sill ungreeted, bright days and dull were as one; but there came an afternoon when, through an open door, she overheard Mrs Shuttlewell speaking to some inquirer. The words came very distinctly to her ears.

"Nay, she's no breeghter. Will yo' come in? . . . Well. . . . Nay, he says nought, but I think it willn't be mony days, poor barne. She seems as she'd be fain to go an' all, sin' ye saw her. Ay, it's a sad pity. She's gotten vara low now . . ."

Of Enoch's questioning voice she heard no more than a murmur, until he said "Good day" in going. It affected her to a quiet flood of tears; and she was strangely unsettled by learning that he called daily, and had said she was not to be told of it unless she asked about him. "Like as he thought ye'd tak't amiss," said Mrs Shuttlewell; and Barbara, for the time, was quite at a loss for his real motive. She only felt grateful, and profoundly cast down.

He went away thinking it terrible that she, whom he had known as his own heart, should be dying alone. But evidently she had not spoken of him.

Terrible; a fate unnatural, and blotting out the sun itself—if indeed the heavens were brass, as he had long supposed. He clung in pity to his vestiges of hope. At least, thank God, it did not seem to be so terrible to her, he thought; and supposing Macdonald right, that woes like these are inevitable, what then? How should one submit?

We who endure to see them, Macdonald said, could not be compassionate if pain and sorrow were not.

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But that was serious: That was to plume oneself at the spectacle: as if he ought to thank God for his own sake that Barbara had to suffer and perish. It might be true, that argument; indeed it had the look of a mathematical fact. No comfort was in it, he would rather not have known it. What mattered that to Barbara?

Virtue is not self-satisfied. Compassion must be conscious only of its object; and we must act or else we are undone.

But at this extreme pass Enoch Watson reached higher than his teacher. From the depths, while he thought of Barbara's undoing and patient death, looking up to the just heavens he saw them open. If by sorrow we, God's creatures, all are moved to gracious pity, much more must God who made us be—that was the thought which flashed upon, and humbled, and like a revelation lifted him. Awed and amazed, tremulous with the joy of this perception, he glanced aside at Barbara and his spirit bowed itself. Not terrible her fate seemed, but august. Tears of the All-Father falling on her as she sought His face, Barbara was as if sainted; and for his own poor tears, rain when the bright bow is in the air, they fell in gladness and deep humility apart.

Him, too, the All-Father's hand had comfortably touched. He was near the end of his worst perplexities.

CHAPTER XL

DREDS OF THE CUP

THE separation of these lovers could not last, and Barbara was to know a little happiness before the end.

Whether Con had not understood her, or whether he loved her in spite of all, she took courage from his coming daily to the door as soon as she knew of it. "Mrs Shuttlewell," she said next morning, when her face was washed and her hair done, "if Mr Watson should call to-day, and I am feeling well—"

"Ay, for seur!" said the woman, interrupting her.

"And if you think he would like to come in—"

"I'll send him to yo'. For seur he'd like to come! He wants nought else, I'll awarrant yo'."

"But you mustn't press him!" said Barbara, looking very directly in her face from the pillow. . . . "You can say you think I would like to see him. You can say that I said so." A faint blush accompanied the last words, and the excellent woman blessed her heart for it.

I think it would have blessed your hearts, who read of it, to see the manner of their meeting. Mrs Shuttlewell was so flushed with the pleasure of bringing them together again, that, after the first word of it to Enoch Watson, speech was denied her; her radiant, apprehensive look, and the further vague sounds escaping from her open mouth detained him for nothing but to see her crimping the edges of a clean apron. So he slipped in and by with a nod. "Eh!" she gasped, and

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stood listening chapfallen, until the emotions of a guilty eavesdropper chased her away to the kitchen.

Enoch had stepped into the little sitting-room immensely agitated by the summons, which indeed was the greatest and most sisterly proof of affection that Barbara had given him; paused a moment at the curtains, losing courage until he bethought him that the doctor had not told her the worst; drawn them aside—Barbara's eyes had the sweet and timid uncertainty of a bride's; her heart full because he loved her, as the quick footfall told, but strangely fluttering because she did not know at all how to take him.—Come away to the kitchen, and say some comfortable things to that over-anxious good creature. Be sure they need no oversight. Be sure, as well, that Barbara will find no forfeiture of his affection.

It is not so hard as you may imagine for lovers to be happy under a sentence of death—if each can think the other unaware of it. Each may find a happiness in the other's air of dear serenity, and in his or her own courage; for happiness is in our way of thinking, not in the nature of things. The courage of these young souls was great, there being the true temper of heroism in both of them; and it is not to tell, what devotion went on one side and the other to their brave pretending.

Barbara, upon whom her weakness gained, wished every day to hear him say that he thought she was looking better. Her greatest care came to be her toilet. She was too weak herself to make it, and Mrs Shuttlewell had become her tire-woman, patiently instructed, with some fatigue, how to reproduce the natural wave in her hair which now required a touch of art. Between these two there was less room for make-believe; Barbara unpacked her heart daily; and Enoch often

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found the woman weeping, without imagining the scene of preparation.

It was characteristic of her always to offer the help with diffidence. "Now if yo' think I can manage, I'll make yo' fit. Mun I?"

"Please," said Barbara.

She came with a basin of water to sponge the lady hands and face; no service in the day so dear to her as this, in which she could touch and soothe her mistress.

Barbara sighed at the grateful coolness. "I'm a dreadful nuisance now," she said, "but I do want to keep Con from fretting. He still thinks I'm going to get well, poor boy."

"Why, so yo' will, doy," said Mrs Shuttlewell, who maintained it to keep her own heart up; "so yo' will, if God please, and be happy wi' him yet."

"We are happy now, I think, for a little while," Barbara mused. "But oh, I am so tired, dear Mrs Shuttlewell. I know I shall never pay your bill! Still that is all right, you know; you must make it out—I shall get you to promise—and I'm sure Con will pay it for me. But you are to have my dresses and things, if you can make any use of them."

The woman's sunken lips came apart, and she paled. She turned away for a towel. "Nay, barne, yo' munnot talk so," she said; and Barbara, when her face had been gently wiped, saw the tears running down Mrs Shuttlewell's cheeks.

"Don't cry," she said mournfully. "You make me want to cry too, and Barb'a West has to be very pleasant. It is that dear boy I am sorry for.— I can raise myself, if you will put the pillows. Now let me rest; a moment. . . . He is so hopeful, and kind. . . . But oh, if I got well, I should have to tell him; he would never believe me—never! You ~~are~~ very good; I

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knew that I could tell you all about it ; but men don't understand. . . . I did try. It breaks my heart sometimes, when he is talking. I smile, you know, to make up a little for the times I treated him badly.—My hair is troublesome ; you are sure you don't mind ? I believe I could do it myself to-day."

"Eh, my barne," the woman cried, her hands faltering, "thou'rt like one o' my awn ! I'd do—" She could not say what she would willingly do.

"Yes, I know," said Barbara, smiling.

"An' as for brass, I'd ware my last penny ! Thou munnot talk o' that no more."

It was spoken with a kind of petulant distress, that such a reckoning should be there to keep them strangers ; she intended to make the "munnot" final, and repeated it as if it were so ; but Barbara's level tones insisted, interrupting her.

"Oh, but I shall see to it," she said. "I know he would *like* to pay. You will let him do that, and—and what else he does for me ? You must remember," she added still more gently, "he would have married me if I had consented."

Barbara did not need to say a word more. The timid soul doubted she had made too bold, and was silent, taking comfort from the handling of Barbara's hair. Usually, the doctor's order that Barbara should lie with her head low had of necessity to be followed, and then the coiffure was but loosely made, while first one patient cheek and then the other pressed the pillow. But this day she seemed a little stronger. When all was done, and she had the hand mirror to scan it by, her gentle heart instructed her to ease the woman's grief.

"Ess," she said, in the tone of her baby-talk, "'at's velly nice. But oo never kiss me after !"

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With a motherly sweet cry, in which astonishment, deprecation and happiness were blended, Mrs Shuttlewell stooped, all a-tremble, to kiss her for the first time.

But the make-believe with Enoch was daily more hard to sustain. It had grown to a pitch of hardihood; and either he was keeping a dreadful gaiety, to hide some better knowledge of her state than Dr Partington had let her have, or she ought not to leave him unprepared for a cruel shock, thinking of which, when once she had imagined it, put her in a fever of concern for him. She could have been in no doubt as to his knowledge—her perceptions were so acute—but that Enoch by this time, in deceiving her, had almost deceived himself. It is impossible to talk hopefully without feeling so. He had begun to stand upon the bit of firm ground that doctors are sometimes mistaken, and to defend the pleasant edifice he reared in vain upon it for her mere beguilement. Is there an unkind trick of kindness?

"Doctor," said Barbara, lifting her eyes full upon him as he felt the pulse, "I want you to be velly truthful and sensible. When am I going to die?"

Dr Partington, who felt for her as much compassion as ever his big heart and fatherly way of thinking could enjoin upon a busy physician, was mightily disconcerted. "My dear young lady!" he exclaimed.

There was a tone of remonstrance in the words, tender enough, but not frank. He had affected surprise.

"No," said Barbara, preventing him, "I want you to tell me. I am sure you have meant to be kind; if I had known how kind you were—Oh, I'm sure if I were a doctor. . . . I would tell you anything you asked; I mean if you were I."

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The simplicity of this appeal put him to shifts, he had relied so surely upon his tact and dignity.

"But, my dear," he said, releasing her wrist as he sat more upright and reproached her with a grave shake of the head, "that is a question I really cannot answer."

"Then it may be at any time," said Barbara, quickly.

The tide of generous blood in Dr Partington flushed purple in his face. "Pray, pray, my dear Miss West, suffer an old man with some experience of cases like yours to express himself in his own way," he said. In speaking, he laid his hand upon hers, and so with an air of reassuring her possessed himself again of the pulse.

It beat feebly, as her voice sounded, but it was not agitated.

"You see," he went on, slowly patting the feeble hand once or twice, "your case is one in which so much depends upon yourself. If you avoid excitement—"

"But, doctor, I am getting weaker," said Barbara. "Please! I have a reason; I have to make people ready. If it were sudden they would be too dreadfully upset."

There was water in the little brown eyes of the doctor, blinking under their shaggy brows. He cleared his throat, blew his nose with deliberation, looked again at Barbara—and said nothing. His glance fell; he took his watch out.

Barbara thought she knew his meaning. "Never mind," she said; "I daresay you can't tell me. I knew I wasn't going to be mended. But I wish you would make it plain to Mr Watson; will you? You know, he is very fond of me; and I don't think he—It ought to be made *plain* to him."

"It shall be, my dear young lady," said the doctor. "Whatever you wish me to do;—and God bless you

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for your brave thoughtfulness." He said this very comfortably, and rose; took up his hat; laid a hand lightly on her head a moment, nodding as he withdrew it; turned half about and took a step or two; at the curtains paused; and, bowing there with an old-fashioned courtesy, said, "Good day, my dear.—If you are sure there is nothing else that I may do for you?"

"Oh, I think not, thank you," said Barbara, faintly, half ready to cry with gratitude. "I am sure you have done much more than doctors do."

"Not so; but what I could, what I could," he corrected. "Now you should close your eyes and sleep awhile. So, good day." And he stepped out backwards, just as if she were a princess. "Good day, my child."

Barbara lay wondering how Con would take such heavy news. She had a great idea of his courage and strength; but since, of late, she had only lived to hear his love's music, the instrument within his breast appeared more moving-delicate, of measureless range and sweeter resonance, than in the old times she had known it; and she was accusing herself of a perilous over-tuning. Dr Partington left her in that self-blame: it was hope, she thought, that had made the music full, and she, not he at all, who had waked the hope. She quailed to think what a crash upon the heart-strings truth would strike.

Dear heart, there was no such anxious need; and no need at all to be remorseful!

But so it came about that Barbara set store on her commission to Dr Partington, and took some comfort from it. Besides, upon reflection, she could think of a hundred passages in which, by keeping silence when Con had talked as if he feared almost nothing, she must have let him see her true mind—prevented him from

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thinking that all he said was sensible. Often she had longed to have done with make-believe, and often he had nearly forced her to speak plainly. True, she supposed it would only have led to more foolish comfort of the same kind; so it was best left to Dr Partington after all. And Con had never spoken quite confidently, but only very hopefully. Yesterday, for instance, when he brought a new supply of flowers for the vases—the dear, silly boy! he *would* spend his money so, and sadly she knew why—after arranging them he had said, “Next year you must see them growing.” She had thought “He does not say, ‘You shall.’” If he had been a little hardier, and made a promise of it, she might have had courage to speak, she felt.

It seemed to Barbara that, calmly looking hand in hand on Death, they would be happiest. Easy, and even kind, to whisper then to him why Death was good! He would believe her, and understand.

Presently she sighed with a great longing for the peace she saw in prospect so. She conceived of this as the end they had both been seeking from the first, a marvellous sweet and quiet destiny, strangely waiting for them; the sign of destiny being, that she had done so much to avoid it—done all to forfeit it. God, she mused amid happy tears, was very good to her, above all that she could ask or think. Ah, surely Con would feel as she did! God being so good!

While, next day, the doubt still troubled her (a gift of tarnished love and parting breath being poor as the widow's mite), he came; and only by his knock she knew that nothing was changed since her talk with Dr Partington. So, at least, she would have said afterwards. But the truth is, that she was instantly aware of a dropped stitch. She had asked the doctor to let Con

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know, but not to say that she wished him to know, or that she herself knew. The first glance at his face confirmed her fear.

Worse. Although she returned his poignant look of cheerfulness, the glance expressed for him timidity and pain, summoning his misguided zeal to its utmost show of winsome animation. He had brought more flowers; he would have her admire them, and tell him how to make them up, where to put the vases; and the tone of weariness that would in spite of her depress her answers made him go about it with a gentler deference. She closed her eyes, saying,—

"Let me wait until you've done, Con. I like best to see the whole effect."

How could he act with such bitter gaiety? If ever the kind heart of Barbara bled for hapless misery in others, it was wrung with anguish now. She could not say, "I know." That must be said in a way to make him sure of her contentment. "For I *am* content," she said to herself; "very, quite content."

He came then and sat upon the bedside, taking her face between his hands to kiss her forehead. She had to open eyes with tears in them, lest he should think her at all indifferent to the flowers. But he scarcely listened to what she said of them, and his next word stunned her.

He had been smitten with a faint alarm by her unsmiling look, and especially by a blue transparency of the lids.

"The time seems long," he said to her fondly, "doesn't it? Courage! . . . I've been imagining what we might do when you are strong again. Shall I tell you? That's one good way to pass the time—imagining. Don't be afraid; I'm not going to talk about our getting married. I know that worries you."

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Oh! The doctor should have written to him, she lamented, and not waited to see him.

"What do you say," he talked on, "to London? I may be going, you know. Wouldn't you like to see the Academy—your old professors? To leave Merchanton altogether! Macdonald put it in my head; but only if you'd go with me. . . . He says I shall have to knock about and gain experience, and London is good for getting on quickly. All pressmen go to London. I should have more money, you know, and the *entrée* for you to all sorts of shows. And you could make a fresh start with your music, couldn't you?"

Barbara had the chill fancy that in her grave in Merchanton she would lie lonesome. It frightened her a little; and dismay at her heart being already very mournful, she longed extremely for the true word of comfort. Her unresponsive listening obliged him at length to raise himself; he saw her glance flit rapidly from one object in the room to another.

"Ah, my dear," he said, "we'd soon forget old Merchanton."

She caught her breath with an appealing look, and he thought she had lifted her face for his kiss. But as he bent to her she spoke in a quick whisper:—

"Con, dear, I'm going to die; the doctor says so—and I know. Oh, I am so sorry, Con."

When he had steeled himself, Enoch said very gently,—"Sorry? For me? But you love me, Barbara!"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah, never be sorry for me," he said.

"It is this," she breathed: "I gave myself."

"To me! Now to me." Utterance was half denied him. But, for his reward, the kiss she rendered to that gust of dolorous passion was pure to him like a maid's.

Her little spell of happiness before the end began

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with it. She had no longer to act a dreadful assurance, or to think of her hidden stain. The founts of love and pity in her woman's breast ran freely. For the love of Enoch Watson, when she knew for certain that it held no blame, Barbara conceived a kind of worship, so wonderful it seemed. She could not doubt that his joy was real; it shone serenely in his face, and gave to his voice a new music. Thus she was able to think of Death, which forbade their banns, as giving her liberty to entertain this love. Through all pain and weakness, that beauty of love's unselfishness continued to light her; and Death being suffered as it were for his sake justly, she approached it through a land of Beulah. Fine conceit of affection! The sun that shines by day and night upon the Delectable Mountains lit her face with martyrdom.

I tell her story to the admirable company of Prudes to whom she bowed so low.

CHAPTER XLI

GOOD HOPE

ALL that can be called tragic in the life of Barbara West ended with this episode of reconciliation. Her dying was not so. Those who were about her saw much beauty in it, rebuking grief; towards the end, she lay as if in the lap of the Effacing Angel. It seemed that, being accomplished, her penance was forgotten; and in this happiness of a sweet nature the end drew near like a consummation.

For when Barbara had seen her mother—whom the grave and gentle vicar of her old church brought by Barbara's wish to the bedside—nothing remained that could distress her. Mrs West forgave her implicitly; showed that she did so in some shock of motherly feeling at the sight of her daughter; and it did not seem to Barbara that she was less than kind in leaving her still to Mrs Shuttlewell, to return for a few hours every day. Barbara was content to be at peace. Now that all had been put right, she lay dozing.

Mrs Shuttlewell, for her part, was so glad without knowing it not to be superseded, that she reproached herself upon feeling happy. To be sure, it was not on this account alone that her breast had grown lighter; nor did she impute it to one cause or another.

She simply could not understand it. Her "poor doy" was near to be lost, and she felt nought but a gladness; in the midst of her work she would stand still to question it. She "felt to know when it came over her," but that did not explain it. It began when she

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was one day redding up, and heard a word spoken freely which let her see that the young gentleman knew as much as she did. His knowing still amazed her. But she argued that, when they loved one another to that extent, she ought to be so much the more sorry for a sad pity. She could be sorry while she thought of that young gentleman. Still she stood and said to herself timidly, "I'm fain of her goin', I do believe." Death is commonly imagined a calamity. "I hope there's nought wrang i' thinkin' so," she said.

But it was not possible to see Barbara West patient and untroubled, and wish another fate for her, more uncertain, less beautiful. As for the inadequate, perplexed and sensitive friend whom Barbara's love at last ennobled, his final doubts fell away as he watched her pass.

In one of the quiet hours when she slept, his conviction of God's compassionate mind gave him a new thought of why the worlds exist. Did not God's virtue require it? A God alone with His majesty, self-sufficing, was not conceivable as the same or great, for even God could not love without objects of His love. We exist because God is what He is. How sure, then, must justice in compassion be! Grief dissolved away, and the boy's love was infinitely humbled, as he saw himself sharing emotions of the Infinite Father. The marvel of that uplifted him in an ecstasy.

Darbyshire had his confession and the story of these days of watching when all was ended. During the last week Darbyshire did his work at the office.

There came an hour when, after looking long and recalling much, his heart grew almost insupportably heavy under its own loss. It was the Barbara of other days whom he should lose, the dear marvel of maidenhood without pride, exquisitely kind. She had been

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this, and yet his playmate; ah, she was his life-mate! What if she died sleeping, and no farewell? He bent over her, trembling to speak her name, to be sure she would hear him; but the peace in which she slept, after sufferings marked so legibly, restrained him.

Ah, no more! Could she die better? It was what he had desired—and with a high serenity of grief he resigned her.

*Golden lads and lasses must,
Like chimney-sweepers, come to dust.*

Had he so much fortitude? An unaccordant trick of memory put into his mind the bitter-simple rhyme, and cast him down upon his knees beside the bed in a disaster of sorrow uncontrollable. He raised the pale skeleton of her dainty hand from the counterpane, and said his farewell in a touch of the lips. Good-bye—and oh, good hope, dear heart! If it were not so how could he care to live?

Barbara stirred at the touch, and half unclosed her eyes. She seemed to consider and know him, and with a voice restored to its natural brightness, "If you stroke my hand now," she said, "I shall forgive you." Then her head moved aside, the eyelids falling.

There was more broken talk of the kind, all on a touching under-breath of happiness. She said quickly, "I have no encore piece, that is why. . . . Oh, not a second time!" And after a little pause, "I shall wear white satin, with some pansies. Do you like that?" Again a tranquil interval, and on a sudden she asked, "Is that you, Con?" in a tone so perfectly normal that he answered her, his heart leaping; and, "Oh, more flowers!" she cried, though he had brought none. "But the room is full of them, you dear Con."

A little secret thrill of fear searched him. When, after long silence, her quiet voice surprised his ear

Good Hope

again, he started. "Poor creatures!" she was saying, "what shall I play for them?" He understood that in imagination she was in a hospital; to play in some hospital had been one of her fancies. "Not a sad piece: some bright one. . . . Now?"

While he waited for the next words, a harp and a 'cello sounded from the street at hand, like a ghostly music in response. It began with a certain deliberation of gaiety, the harp in a tripping march of repetitional chords, to the 'cello's undertone of a half-remembered sweetness. Then a clear tenor cried above the harmony, upbearing it; and he knew the strain for Schubert's, the song for Shakespeare's, of all sweet songs in such a time perhaps the most divinely sad to hear.

Who is Sylvia, what is she
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair and wise is she;
The heavens such grace did lend her
That adored she might be.

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.
To her eyes doth Love repair
To help him of his blindness,
And, being helped, inhabit there?

For Enoch, the song in its beauty was ravishing with praise of Barbara. Bitterly streamed his tears, and he stood with clenched hands to hear it all.

Then to Sylvia let us sing,
That Sylvia is excelling:
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling!
To her garlands let us bring.

The music ceased abruptly, and there was no more; from without, as he listened, no sound but the far-off cry of a hawker. And he could think her sweetly

Barbara West

lulled, for now she lay most peacefully. As if he had assisted at some beautiful service for the dead, he composed himself.

Mrs Shuttlewell came in from sending away the musicians. She looked at him anxiously ; then at the bed ; glanced uncertainly again at him ; drew nearer ; bent over Barbara, and then gave a low cry,—

“Oh, poor bairn, and thee wi’ t’ angels !”

THE END

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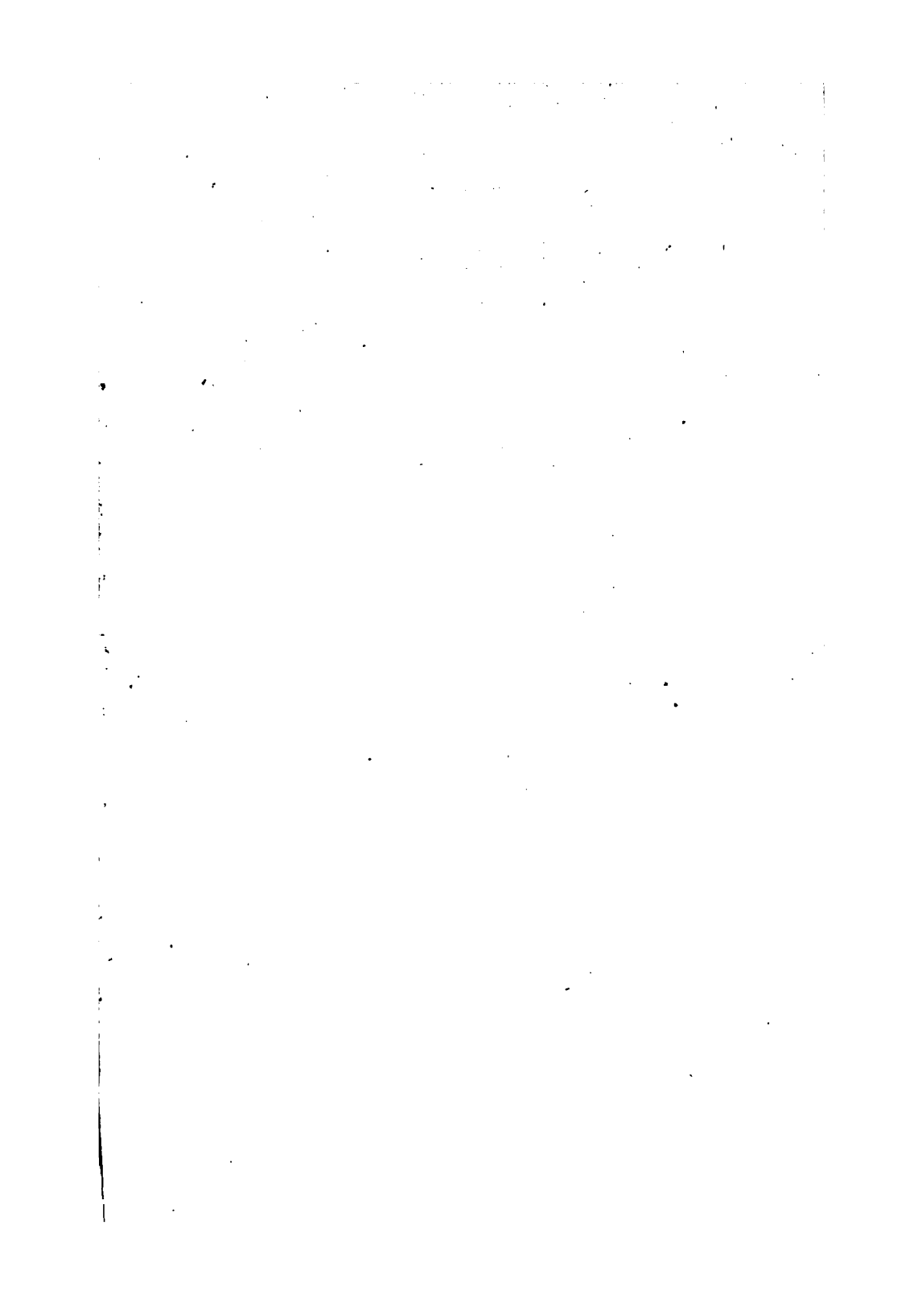
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